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WILLIAM W. WHITE

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## Mississippi Confederate Veterans Seek Political Appointments, 1876-1900

The techniques used by Mississippi Confederate veterans in campaigning for elective office were many and varied in the quarter-century of veteran rule, 1875-1900.<sup>1</sup> One may see the same methods applied in the quest for political appointments. The appeal to the electorate was mainly vocal (and largely lost); the appeal for appointments to public office was usually in writing. In the governor's correspondence are preserved many interesting examples of this aspect of the Confederate veteran in Mississippi politics.

Since all Mississippi governors from 1876 to 1901 were veterans, they were naturally sympathetic to the requests of their former comrades in arms. Perhaps this explains why veterans actually held forth in the appointive positions longer than in the elective ones. Once appointed, the veteran seemed to look upon his job as a Confederate sinecure—safe from the younger, nonveteran generation.

As in election campaigns, the veteran asking for political preferment for himself or for a veteran friend might mention ability to do the job; but mainly the position was sought on the basis of one thing: the war record as a Confederate soldier. This record—the magic claim to political favor and office—had several well-worn facets. Among these, length of military service was of considerable importance: naturally, from secession to surrender was the ideal. A writer seeking the appointment of Dr. W. W. Hunt as Superintendent of the Lunatic Asylum in 1878 stressed the point that "at the commencement of the late war he

<sup>1</sup>See William W. White, "Mississippi Confederate Veterans in Public Office, 1875-1900," *Journal of Mississippi History*, XX (1958), 147-56.

[Hunt] volunteered & left with the 2nd Company & remained in the army till the close of the war."<sup>2</sup> A veteran reminded Governor John M. Stone that "in the distribution of favors I think the older soldiers [who volunteered early in the war] should have preference over those who stayed at home when their services were most needed."<sup>3</sup>

Although length of service was often advanced as a claim to office, a more valuable claim was based upon a record of bravery, especially when accompanied by wounds and disability. N. L. Dabney of Winona, Mississippi, advanced his record not for his own gain, but to secure an appointment for his father:

Though it has been a long time since we last met well do I remember Col. Stone of Davis Brigade. It was when the times tried mens souls that I saw you last. If I am not mistaken it was on that memorable third of July 63 [Gettysburg], when so many of our boys lost their lives. I was very badly wounded at that fight & have never entirely recovered from it. Now Gov the reason I allud to the past is to show you that we have been acquainted as Soldiers of the CSA. I was a member of the 11 [th]. But enough of the past & now to the main point of the letter.

With this appropriate introduction, the recommendation of his father for a state medical position followed.<sup>4</sup>

It was unusual to be so specific as this veteran writing from Langford, Mississippi, in 1896: ". . . I carry an ounce of Yankee lead, & will carry it to my grave. It is the effect of that which renders me partially unfit for manual labor. . . . Any favor you might render me will be highly appreciated."<sup>5</sup>

Missing limbs were often cited as proof of gallantry in action. A friend recommending J. B. Boothe for the position of Circuit Judge wrote:

Not only has Mr. Boothe served his people and state faithfully and earnestly as a party leader but also as a soldier, as his empty coat sleeve well attests, and this, other things being any

<sup>2</sup>W. Cothran to Governor John M. Stone, January 5, 1878. Stone Correspondence, 1876-1882, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Box 9, Folder 93. All unpublished correspondence hereafter cited is from the Governor's Correspondence and Papers in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

<sup>3</sup>Captain [?] Gwin to Gov. Stone, (ca. 1890). Stone Correspondence, 1890-1896, Undated A-Z, Box 1, Folder 4.

<sup>4</sup>N. L. Dabney to Gov. Stone, February 7, 1878. Stone Correspondence, 1876-1882, Box 10, Folder 97.

<sup>5</sup>J. C. Hughes to Governor Anselm J. McLaurin, January 22, 1896. McLaurin Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 30.

ways near equal, should entitle him to preference over those who have not been so unfortunate; being an old wounded *Reb.* myself I have a high regard and warm feeling for all such.<sup>6</sup>

As indicated above, party loyalty frequently found its way into the letters. Loyalty to the Democratic Party—the party of the Redemption—was synonymous with loyalty to the Confederate cause; hence, references to party regularity were logically interspersed with facts about the military record. In the case of Mr. Boothe, mentioned above, the governor was advised that “Mr. Boothe is and always has been a good democrat. Mr. Boothe was a good soldier and left one arm in Virginia to testify that he [has] been tried and found allright.”<sup>7</sup> Again the combination of party loyalty and wounds was impressed upon Governor McLaurin on behalf of Captain R. B. Jones, an applicant for the position of census enumerator for Panola County: “We have in our County no truer Democrat nor did the Confederate Roster call for a better soldier. For this work we consider him entirely competent even though he will have only one hand to do the work with.” An appended note reads: “Jones app. 2/12/90.”<sup>8</sup> The following applicant took a rather broad view of his record, which might serve here as another example of party loyalty:

Dear Governor

Sire your Recommendation to Supt of the Miss Mills came all Right But as yet I got no position. My children ar all in the mills at work and I cant git a job no whare and I write to you hoping that you can give me a position in the State Goverment I will do any thinge that I am competent of I aint no Lureur or Dr no a teacher nutheng But a plain old Statesmen. . . . I hope you will hunte me a position of sum kinde as I am an old Soulder of the Confederate State and I carry 7 wounds that I dont feel it no disgrace to carry them and I have Bin as true a demuercter as the State of Miss can produce and have don as much for the party as any man could of don. . . . Hoping to heare from you and a faverable Reply I am yours Fraternaly

R. M. Wilkinson<sup>9</sup>

The letter below must have been a joy to receive. Little doubt

<sup>6</sup>J. B. West to Gov. McLaurin, January 10, 1896. McLaurin Correspondence, Box 5, Folder 21.

<sup>7</sup>J. J. Stack to Gov. McLaurin, January 6, 1896. *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>Perkins Jones to Gov. Stone, February 11, 1890. Stone Correspondence, 1890-1896, Box 3, Folder 12.

<sup>9</sup>R. M. Wilkinson to Gov. McLaurin, January 24, 1896. McLaurin Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 32.

is left concerning party fealty, but the reader today may wonder whether the governor's old veteran comrade actually desired an appointment.

Beauregard, Miss.

Jan 26 1896

Dear Anse

I have just realized that you are governor of the great state of Mississippi. Now Anse I am not like these Methodist [s] always asking favors but I want you to appoint me to some lucrative position for the next four years. In 1844 I voted for James K. Polk for president of the United States and ever since that time I have been pushing the Democratic wagon. I have never had a ride yet, I am getting too old to work now, and I do think that I have worked hard enough to deserve a rest. Now Anse remember me and put me somewhere for four years and then I will be satisfied to step down and out of the way. Answer at once and let me know what my chances are. You have made one good appointment when you appointed Powell for judge. Now make another one and appoint me something. . . . Small favors are thankfully received and larger ones in proportion.

Your friend,

Moses J. Ferguson<sup>10</sup>

Another claim to office often advanced was the privations which ex-soldiers claimed were the result of war service or the demand for preference as a war veteran because of need. A veteran member of the Second Mississippi Infantry asked Governor Stone for the position of Superintendent of Education to replace T. W. Cardoza, who was facing impeachment charges in 1876.

I am very poor and have a wife and Six Small children to support, and need the emoluments of the office, but at the same time I think that I am both honest and competent and would discharge the duties of the office with fidelity. . . . [If you appoint me] it will be long remembered by an old friend *who has done his best for you on two occasions* — at Yorktown Va, and Tupelo, Miss., and is willing to [do] likewise when an opportunity presents itself.<sup>11</sup>

A Natchez attorney sought an appointment for a veteran who

<sup>10</sup>Moses J. Ferguson to Gov. McLaurin, January 26, 1896. McLaurin Correspondence, Box 6, Folder 34.

<sup>11</sup>W. C. Bromley to Gov. Stone, March 25, 1876. Stone Correspondence, 1876-1882, Box 1, Folder 1.

had been a planter but could no longer get work. It was suggested that he might be appointed manager of one of the State farms or put in charge of one of the work camps.

. . . I want to enlist your services in behalf of James C. Brandon. . . . He is an ex-Confederate, and our laws recognize that as a meritorious fact; it is only one of many merits with Brandon. He is partly crippled from a broken hip and leg. . . .<sup>12</sup>

Letters were sometimes directed to the governor's secretary on behalf of a veteran seeking office. G. W. Kimball of Booneville sought the help of Allen Talbot, Governor Stone's secretary, and asked him to see Stone concerning the appointment of veteran John H. Smith as enumerator of the State Census for Prentiss County.

He is a fine business man, for 12 years Circuit Clerk of our County, and a Confederate Soldier in the fullest sence of the word, and a life long democrat. . . . [As to the job] he wants it, Kneeds it. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Another letter points out that Smith was the Secretary of the Prentiss County Confederate Veteran Association, thereby bringing organized pressure to bear upon the governor.<sup>14</sup>

Only rarely did a veteran advance the belief that his war experience itself was training for a particular job. J. M. Hoyle, M.D., however, thought that his war duties qualified him for the position of Superintendent of the Lunatic Asylum at Meridian. He wrote: ". . . I know of no way to get a place without making it known that I desire it. . . . I was in charge of Hospitals 3 years during the war, was surgeon and acted sometimes as inspector of Hospitals." Four days later Dr. Hoyle wrote again with extra details of his services to the C. S. A.<sup>15</sup>

The above illustrations indicate the political uses made by Mississippi Confederate veterans of their war records and the concomitant devotion to the Lost Cause and the Democratic Party. Encouraged by their strangle hold upon both elective and appointive offices following the Redemption of 1875, the veterans sought to serve not only their own generation but also the next as well. Yet, age finally triumphed; by 1900 the veteran holders of public office—elective and appointive—were slowly giving way to nonveterans who had only hazy notions about the Lost Cause but were boldly facing new causes in a reunited land.

<sup>12</sup>Lemuel P. Conner to Gov. McLaurin, December 1, 1899. McLaurin Correspondence, Box 37, Folder 43.

<sup>13</sup>G. W. Kimball to Allen Talbot, February [?], 1890. Stone Correspondence, 1890-1896, Box 2, Folder 9.

<sup>14</sup>P. M. Savery to Gov. Stone, February 2, 1890. *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup>J. M. Hoyle to Gov. Stone, January 9, 14, 1890. Stone Correspondence, 1890-1896, Box 2, Folder 3 and 4.

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## How Microscopic Is Regional History?

The Vanderbilt School of historians has been studying for some years certain basic aspects of ante-bellum Southern society. This group of researchers has directed its efforts primarily to an analysis of the social and economic structure of the South as it appeared at the end of the ante-bellum period. These historians have dealt with broad areas of the ante-bellum South, such as a state, largely using massive sampling methods and concentrating on the period 1850-1860. There is a great need, however, for more detailed studies of smaller areas, treated exhaustively and over the entire ante-bellum period. This writer's doctoral thesis (University of Alabama), "Structure of Landholdings and Slaveownership in Ante-Bellum Montgomery County, Alabama," which covers the county's growth from the first public sales in 1817 through the ante-bellum period, was the beginning of another effort in this overall study of Southern society. Now it is possible to see whether or not Montgomery County evolved into the picture of 1860 painted in *Plain Folk of the Old South*, *Tennessee Yeomen 1840-60*, *Mississippi Farmers*, and other such studies.

A traveler journeying through Montgomery County in 1850 or 1860 would have probably concluded from a superficial view that the planters had seized the finest land while the small farmers had been forced into the less desirable Strata Ridge and Red Prairie regions. For in fact, 918 landowners possessed land exclusively in the Strata Ridge and Red Prairies, which represented 51 per cent of the county's area, whereas only 402 owned land exclusively in the remaining 49 per cent of the county which formed the three northern subdivisions of the county and included the best land. The three larger groups of landowners were divided nearly equally between the richer northern half of the county and the poorer southern half, whereas just under 75 percent of the small farmers lived in the southern half of the county, as contrasted with 25 per cent



in the richer northern half. Segregation of small farmers seemed apparent, for in fact they were concentrated in the poorest area. Was this due to pressure, as it appeared to the northern traveler? Most of these small farmers who were concentrated in 1860 in the Red Prairie and Strata Ridge arrived after 1835, when these two regions alone had any sizeable public lands for sale. The figures for 1835 show that the differences so apparent in 1850 and 1860 were not great at that time. A farm-by-farm study of the true structure of landholdings and ante-bellum land patterns in the county from 1820 through 1860 proves the superficial view of the traveler to be incorrect. Such a microscopic study will produce an accurate picture throughout the entire history of an area and not merely the final picture which may provide the basis for superficial and misleading views. In order to understand Southern slaveholding and landholding patterns completely, it is necessary to discover their growth and evolution through each of their different stages. Such small area studies get down to "cases" and the facts, and clear up many misleading observations.

The picture produced by the results of an exhaustive study of one area should prove similar to that of like areas. This has certainly been the case for the late ante-bellum period in the previous studies of the Vanderbilt School. If sufficient studies of the different areas making up the major sections of each Southern state are made, the historian will gradually secure the true and complete picture of Southern society. No longer will scholarly works make such a statement as the following concerning the treatment of slaves: "Overwork and semi-starvation were common." This statement and numerous others in Chapter VI, "Reign of Terror," of Ralph Korngold's *Two Friends of Man* show how some writers still prefer to quote as facts statements made by fanatics, idealists, or tourists. Mr. Korngold's picture of slavery is that of an abolitionist and not that of such modern scholars as James B. Sellers, Charles Sydnor, U. B. Phillips, and others, who give an entirely different picture of slavery.

In order to make the microscopic study of Montgomery County, the following types of materials were used: original census returns; especially schedules I, II, and IV; wherever available, tax books, soil surveys, farm journals, diaries; the records of the State Abstract Company of Montgomery, Alabama; and the Montgomery County Tract Book. The writer has constructed maps showing the farms of Montgomery County for 1820, 1825, 1830, 1835, 1840, 1850, and 1860, and maps showing the sales of Federal lands for the following periods: prior to 1820, 1821-25, 1826-29, 1820-39, 1840-49 and 1850-60. By use of the land maps prepared exclusively from the abstract records, a card for each of the seven different dates was prepared, showing every family's entire holdings in

Montgomery County. Furthermore a card for each Federal census was made, showing the slaveholdings of each head of a family. Then a correlation of these two sources was made in order to answer the following questions: How large were the landholdings? Did the rich landowners possess the best land, and if so, did they secure it by crowding out their less prosperous neighbors? Did small landowners live next to or near the large landowners? Did the slaveowners and the nonslaveowners intermingle or live in separate communities? Did the slaveowners have an unfair advantage in the quest for land?

Such a research method produced the following facts about Montgomery County. By 1830 it was a true Black Belt county. The black segment of society continued to increase until in 1860 it represented 66 per cent of the whole population, just the reverse of the ratio recorded in the Alabama Territorial Census of 1818. Slaveholding heads of families remained from 1830 through 1860 in the majority in the county as a whole. Unfortunately the census of 1820 is missing, and this prevents any study on this question before 1830. The number of slaveholding heads of families continued to grow through the ante-bellum period, yet there was a large decline percentage-wise between 1840 and 1850 in the entire county, due to the growth of the city of Montgomery where many nonslaveholders lived. On the other hand, between 1830 and 1840, the period of the greatest sale of government land, the number of slaveholders in rural Montgomery County showed a large gain, and there was a small but steady overall gain percentage-wise for the remainder of the ante-bellum period. By 1860, 60 per cent of the rural heads of families were slaveholders.

Throughout the ante-bellum period, the majority of the slaveowners owned less than ten slaves, most of them owning five or fewer. This class, those who owned five or fewer slaves, alone formed around one third of the total white population and two thirds of the slaveholders throughout the period of study. Although there was a decline from the high point of 67 per cent, this group still represented 61 per cent of all the slaveholding population in 1860. Next in size came the slaveholders who owned 11 to 19 slaves. This group competed with the small planter class (20-49 slaves) for the honor of being the second largest group of slaveholders. Neither one ever represented over 16.5 per cent of the total slaveholders of the county. Together they formed throughout the ante-bellum period approximately 30 per cent of the slaveholding population and never had more than half the number of the small farmer class which owned from one to ten slaves. In 1860 the small planter group had edged slightly ahead. The last group and always the smallest segment of the slaveholders was the large planter class who owned fifty or more slaves. This last division of society grew steadily from 3.8 per cent



in 1830 to 8.5 per cent in 1860, which was a small decline from the 8.6 per cent of 1850.

From the above discussion of the size of slaveholdings, it is evident that most slaveholders were in reality not in the privileged upper class but instead were members of a rural or urban class composed of themselves and the nonslaveholding small landowners. At most, never more than 25 per cent of the slaveowners belonged to any "slave oligarchy." The remaining 75 per cent had interests, both economic and social, which were more closely identified with those of the nonslave-owning landowners than with those of the two planter classes.

Any study of slavery which, as most accounts do, discusses only the plantation slaves is inadequate for a true understanding of the entire picture. In Montgomery County as late as 1860, 26.8 per cent of the slaves lived outside the plantation economy. As many as 44 per cent did not live on the plantation in 1830. Progressively throughout the ante-bellum period, however, a larger and larger percentage of the slaves came to live under plantation conditions. By 1860 large planters alone owned 49.4 per cent of the slaves in rural Montgomery County and 45.1 per cent of the slaves in the entire county. The big change came in the 1830's, the period of the largest land sales. After 1840 there was little change in this regard.

Slaveholders did not segregate themselves from the nonslaveholder. A close study of the correlation of slaveownership and landownership proves that all landowners, whether slaveowners or not, intermingled in all the areas of the county and that slaveholders did not possess an unfair advantage in the quest for land.

As previously mentioned, the land patterns manifested in 1860 might give the impression that certain areas had gradually been taken over by the larger classes of landowners. In order to understand this situation, it is necessary to study the whole settlement pattern. Throughout the entire ante-bellum period the small farmer class, who owned less than 240 acres of land, continued to grow. In 1820 this class comprised 62 per cent of the landowners. In 1835 small farmers made up 72 per cent of the landowning class, and this remained true throughout the ante-bellum period. An act of Congress in 1832, which provided for the sale of forty acre plots of land, immediately affected the size of the holding of the small farmer. Thus after 1835 the forty and eighty acre holdings became the typical ones for the county.

The next largest class was the large farmer with 241 to 480 acres of land. This class declined from 23 per cent of all landowners to 13 per cent in 1860. Numerically the class grew, but the high influx of small farmers, especially after 1830, caused this group to decline in rela-

tive importance. Next in size was the small planter class who owned between 481 and 1,000 acres of land. This class comprised 10 per cent of the landowning population in 1820 and 8 per cent in 1860. The last and smallest class was the large planter class who owned over 1,000 acres of land. Large planters comprised 5 per cent of the landowners in 1820 and 6 per cent in 1860.

Before 1835 the three northern regions, which were the first settled and the most valuable areas, had assumed the appearance they were to exhibit in 1860. These three regions were centers of the large landowners from the beginning. There, a relatively large number of planters settled in comparison with the Red Prairie and Strata Ridge. Planters and large farmers did not force out any group before 1835 but instead built their estates primarily through purchase of Federal lands and through inheritance. In some places, such as the first river bottoms and Houston Clay of the Black Prairie, they secured the greater portion of these choice soils. The explanation of the trend toward segregation within certain types of soil is simple. These first bottoms were often swampy and unhealthy, and the landowner had to face the problem of overflow, often yearly. Much labor was required to clear these bottoms and to prepare the soil for cultivation. Crops were often a total loss. The small landowners, who possessed few if any slaves, usually by choice bypassed these bottoms, as the higher second bottoms and the adjoining Mt. Meigs Terrace were more healthful and the land could be cleared and put into cultivation with a minimum of effort and expense. Nevertheless, the river bottom type soil was not the exclusive preserve of the planters, as some small landowners entered and remained. Similar disadvantages caused small landowners to pass over the rich Houston Clay of the Black Belt in the early period in preference for the adjoining creek bottom land. In the beginning even the large landowners also bypassed this soil. Beginning in 1830, however, they led the movement into the gummy soil of the region. Small farmers were not anxious to farm in such soil. The work was backbreaking, and most of these small landowners did not possess the labor supply needed for this type of soil. Nor were the farmers' implements of that age fitted to cultivate prairie soil. Available implements were expensive, and farmers chose the areas that could be brought under cultivation with the greatest speed and ease. Another important factor was the necessity of boring deep wells, a very expensive operation.

A point to be stressed is that in 1835 only 33 per cent of the occupied land was outside of the three northern areas. Yet, already the tide of settlement was turning south, for it was in this period that so many small farmers came into the county. Nearly all the government lands had been sold in the three northern regions. The movement of population and agricultural interest spread from the river bottoms and the Mt.

Meigs Terrace southward to the Black Prairie in the late twenties and thirties, and then on to the Red Prairie and Strata Ridge in the forties and fifties, respectively.

Segregation based on size of landholdings did not exist in any region. Landowners of all sizes intermingled extensively in all soils with the exceptions of the previously mentioned first river bottoms and the Black Prairie, and even in these regions there was intermingling. Certainly no serious pressure to crowd small landowners out was exerted before 1835. All late arrivals were forced after 1835, however, to go further south into the two less desirable regions. The smaller landowners who settled early in the richer soils remained and suffered no great disadvantage in retaining their good soil. There is only a small decline in the total number of small farmers of the three northern regions when one compares the totals for 1835 and 1860. Their earlier settlement pattern of avoiding the Houston Clay and first bottoms was, in the long run, unwise, but it had been by choice, and better land was still available at the time of their choice.

During the forties the Red Prairie was settled in force, and by 1850 most of the remaining government land was in the poor sandy region, the Strata Ridge. Although most of the settlers in these areas were small farmers, larger landowners did purchase in the area during the forties and fifties, as there was no other available land. The larger landowners did not secure all the best soil but in nearly all cases got approximately the same type of soil as their neighbors, the small farmers. It would certainly be erroneous to picture landownership as being static in any portion of the county. Men's fortunes in all classes rose and fell. In the fifties many larger landowners either sold parts of their estates that were not close to their major holdings or divided them among heirs. Seldom, however, was a large estate broken into a number of small farms. Naturally after land passed out of government ownership, the large landowners' wealth would give them some advantage over their small neighbors in the quest for any land that might be sold in their neighborhood.

From the above facts, it seems evident that the early settlement policy had much to do with whatever segregation there was of small farmers. In the beginning, all landowners, large or small, tended to choose soil alike. Expansion at the expense of small landowners was a small factor in forcing the smaller farmer into the poorer southern regions of the county. Time of arrival was paramount and was responsible for the difference in the basic composition of the three northern regions of the county from that of the two poorer regions. Furthermore, the early selection of soil, influenced as it was by the difficulties involved in bringing certain areas under cultivation, was fundamental in establishing the landholding patterns within different regions.

Montgomery County was a stronghold for an expanding prosperous rural middle class, which formed the dominant and typical element of the population. No "slave oligarchy" or small group of great planters was pushing this class to the wall. Only through an intensive study of a small area over the entire history of the county could the true answer be found to the heavy concentration of small farmers in the poorer regions of Montgomery County. This is only one example of the wealth of knowledge to be obtained by the microscopic approach.

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## What Is "Metaphysical" Poetry?

As long ago as 1902, Edward Dowden declared flatly: "I do not believe in the existence of this so-called 'metaphysical school.'"<sup>1</sup> Mark Van Doren, at the height of the Donne revival, avoided the question of my title by saying simply, "By metaphysical poetry I mean the poetry of the seventeenth century."<sup>2</sup> Recently Joseph Summers has protested the imprecision of the term and has suggested "Donne-like" instead.<sup>3</sup> The question is: What does "metaphysical" poetry mean in criticism today (if it still has a valid meaning)?; and the method I propose is to trace the meaning of the term from Dryden to the present, taking account of its sometimes gradual, sometimes drastic shifting and giving especial attention to the wide-ranging discussion of the subject in the criticism of the past decade.

Although Dryden is generally credited with first calling attention to the metaphysical method in poetry, A. H. Nethercot has shown that some critics had at least used the term before him, and that the term after Dryden was far from uncommon.<sup>4</sup> Dryden said of Donne that he "affects the metaphysics . . . and perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their

1. *New Studies in Literature* (London, 1902), p. 92.

2. Theodore Spencer and Mark Van Doren, *Studies in Metaphysical Poetry: Two Essays and a Bibliography* (New York, 1939), p. 25.

3. George Herbert: *His Religion and Art* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), p. 204.

4. Spence had used the term in his *Anecdotes*, and Dr. Johnson was thought to have borrowed Spence's MS while writing the *Lives of the Poets*. The Italian poet Testi spoke of the metaphysical conceit in reference to Marino's poetry. After Dryden's and before Dr. Johnson's employment of the term, Leonard Welsted, John Oldmixon, Pope, and Joseph Warton used it. See Arthur J. Nethercot, "The Term 'Metaphysical Poets' before Johnson," *Modern Language Notes*, XXXVII (1922), 11-17.

hearts."<sup>5</sup> To this first description of the metaphysical method as intellectual affectation, Pope added censure of metaphysical wit and conceits as untrue to nature.<sup>6</sup> Nethercot thinks that the idea of a "metaphysical" school began to crystallize in the age of Pope,<sup>7</sup> but if it did, a clear delineation of the school, as well as a thoroughgoing definition of the method, was not forthcoming until Dr. Johnson's *Life of Cowley*.

Dr. Johnson thought the metaphysical method was borrowed from Marino and propagated by Donne and Ben Jonson. In this method

The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtlety surprises; but the reader commonly thinks his improvement dearly bought, and though he sometimes admires, is seldom pleased.<sup>8</sup>

5. "Origins and Progress of Satire," *Essays of John Dryden*, ed. W. P. Ker (Oxford, 1900), II, 19.

6. In a letter to Walsh in 1706 (*Works of Pope*, ed. Elwin and Courthope [London, 1871-1889], VI, 51), Pope had indicated not only the needlessness of conceits in improving nature but also their essential harmfulness. In a letter to Henry Cromwell in 1710 (VI, 116), he had castigated Crashaw's conceits as only "pretty conceptions, fine metaphors." In the "Essay on Criticism" (II, 50-51), Pope denounced the wild irregularity of conceits:

"Some to conceits alone their taste confine,  
And glitt'ring thoughts struck out at ev'ry line;  
Please'd with a work where nothing's just or fit;  
One glaring Chaos and wild heap of wit."

7. Pope himself, Nethercot thinks, was the first eighteenth-century figure "to form anything even approximating a complete estimate of the Metaphysicals as a group." He bases his opinion, first on remarks Pope made about various metaphysicals—Carew, Crashaw, Cowley, Donne—all recorded in Spence's *Anecdotes*, which was not published until 1820. Even stronger evidence of Pope's conception of a metaphysical school, however, is a listing of poets headed "school of Donne" found among his papers and first published in Ruffhead's *Life* (1769). The list is remarkably all-inclusive and, significantly perhaps, Herbert is not on it. I quote the list from Nethercot: "Cowley, Davenant, Michael Drayton, Sir Thomas Overbury, Randolph, Sir John Davis, Sir John Beaumont, Cartwright, Cleiveland, Crashaw, Bishop Corbet, Lord Falkland, Carew, T. Carey, G. Sandys, in his Par. of Job, Fairfax, Sir John Mennis, Tho. Baynal." Carew and T. Carey are bracketed with the notation "In matter," Sandys and Fairfax with the notation "In versification" (all four bracketed with the caption "Models to Waller"), and Mennis and Baynal with the notation "Originals of Hudibras." See "The Reputation of the 'Metaphysical Poets' During the Age of Pope," *Philological Quarterly*, IV (1925), 166-179.

8. *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. Mrs. Alexander Napier (London, 1890), I, 24-25.



The metaphysical poets — to Johnson they were Suckling, Waller, Denham, Cowley, Cleveland, and (in the Hobson poems) Milton—wrote “rather as beholders than partakers of human nature,” having turned aside from the proper paths of poetry in a “voluntary deviation from nature in pursuit of something new and strange,” failing “to give delight by their desire of exciting admiration.” Cowley, in particular, whom Johnson thought “the last of that race and undoubtedly the best,” had the major fault of “pursuing his thoughts to their last ramifications,” by which he lost “the grandeur of generality”; so that

he wrote with abundant fertility, but neglect or unskilful selection; with much thought, but with little imagery; he is never pathetick, and rarely sublime, but always either ingenious or learned, either acute or profound.<sup>9</sup>

Johnson's censure of the metaphysical poets may perhaps be summarized in terms of the following faults: the “violent” formation of poetic images by “yoking” together far-fetched, unnatural elements; and intellectual emphasis both in the learned sources of imagery and in the essential structure of the poem (subtlety, ingenuity, reasoned argument—“pursuing thoughts to their last ramification”); a deliberate deviation from nature and from the natural and true aims of poetry (pursuing the strange, unusual, surprising, instead of the natural, delightful, and grand).

Dr. Johnson's characterization of the metaphysical poets was not essentially changed in the nineteenth century. Nethercot has shown that critical interest in them, which had languished after Johnson, was renewed in the course of the Romantic revival, but this interest was in metaphysical lyricism, melancholy, and enthusiasm; the faults which Johnson had criticized were either overlooked or excused as examples of the “quaintness” of the age.<sup>10</sup> During the remainder of the nineteenth century, and especially around the turn of the twentieth century, interest in metaphysical poetry reached the proportions of a revival, as Joseph Duncan has demonstrated.<sup>11</sup> Attention was focused particularly on the metaphysical poets' use of personal, individual experience as the raw material of poetry, their psychological realism, and their intense concern for the relation of thought to feeling. Implicit

9. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

10. “The Reputation of the ‘Metaphysical Poets’ During the Age of Johnson and the ‘Romantic Revival,’” *Studies in Philology*, XXII (1925), 81-132.

11. Joseph E. Duncan, *The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry* (Minneapolis, 1959).

in the revival of critical interest certainly were modifications of Johnson's definition, but a systematic, formulated reinterpretation of the nature and meaning of metaphysical poetry did not appear until the essays of H. J. C. Grierson and T. S. Eliot in the 1920's.

Grierson's essay in 1921 in his *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems* redefined metaphysical poetry, embodying the nineteenth-century changes in critical attitudes noted above, but going beyond them to a broader synthesis. He explained first that the poetry is essentially philosophical, not as great as that of Lucretius and Dante or Milton, but philosophical nevertheless in the sense that its central theme is the relation of the human spirit to the universe. The chief characteristics of the metaphysical poets are

the more intellectual, less verbal, character of their wit compared with the conceits of the Elizabethans; the finer psychology of which their conceits are often the expression; their learned imagery; the argumentative, subtle evolution of their lyrics; above all the peculiar blend of passion and thought, feeling and ratiocination which is their greatest achievement. (pp. xv-xvi)

Analyzing Donne's poetry to illustrate the metaphysical method in the hands of its best practitioner, he called attention to the depth and range of feeling; the use of irony, paradox, and conceits; the crossing of rhetorical with rhythmical patterns to produce sometimes bizarre harmonies; the evident desire to startle the reader by strange and surprising ideas; the juxtaposition of learned and colloquial language; the recondite images; the frequently rough, wrenched accent; and the psychological probing into the inner recesses of the mind and heart. Informing Grierson's analysis is his central emphasis on the intellectuality of this poetry, the "blend of passion and thought." Donne's mind, for example, "his acute and subtle intellect was the servant, if sometimes the unruly servant, of passion and imagination" (p. xxvii).

As to a "school" of Donne, Grierson cautioned, before tracing Donne's influence on poets of the court and church, that one can speak of a "school" only with certain clear restrictions:

It is not only that they show little of Donne's subtlety of mind or "hydroptic, immoderate thirst of human learning," but they want, what gives its interest to this subtle and fantastic misapplication of learning,—the complexity of mood, the range of personal feeling which lends such fullness of life to Donne's strange and troubled poetry. His followers, amorous and courtly, or pious



and ecclesiastical, move in a more rarefied atmosphere; their poetry is much more truly "abstract" than Donne's, the witty, fantastic elaboration of one or two common moods, of compliment, passion, devotion, penitence. (p. xxx)

Especially with regard to the divine poets' use of the metaphysical conceit, Grierson made this important reservation: "... in the metaphysical subtleties of conceit they found something that is more than conceit, symbols in which to express or adumbrate their apprehensions of the infinite" (p. xxxiii). These restrictions are pointed out here, because it will become apparent that most critics following Grierson tended to overlook them.

In his essay "The Metaphysical Poets" in 1922, T. S. Eliot posed the question "to what extent the so-called metaphysicals formed a school . . . and how far this so-called school or movement is a digression from the main current." His answer was that the metaphysicals were a school only in a very loose sense and that they were in the main current of England poetic tradition, not a digression from it. Eliot thought that the digression came after the metaphysicals, "aggravated" by the work of Milton and Dryden, and that it was characterized by a "dissociation of sensibility." The primary characteristic of metaphysical poetry, he held, was a "unified sensibility" which made possible "a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling." This relation of thought and feeling, which in his essay on Marvell he called "a tough reasonableness beneath the slight lyric grace," Eliot found to be the only distinctive characteristic of the metaphysicals, since other aspects of their poetry—conceits, telescoped images, learned allusions, simplicity and purity of diction, argumentative, analytic evolution of the poem—all were present in varying degrees in most good poetry. After the dissociation of sensibility, beginning with Milton and continuing until the present, the metaphysical poets *seemed* witty, fantastic, obscure, and difficult, to be sure.<sup>12</sup> Metaphysical wit, he explained in his essay on Marvell,

is confused with erudition because it belongs to an educated mind, rich in generations of experience; and it is confused with cynicism because it implies a constant inspection and criticism

12. After the metaphysicals, that is, poetry became reflective, not intellectual. Eliot thought that the modern poet, faced with the enormous complexity of the world, had to learn to become "more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning" ("The Metaphysical Poets")

of experience. It involves, probably, a recognition, implicit in the expression of every experience, of other kinds of experience which are possible.

"This," said M. Y. Hughes, "is silencing Dr. Johnson with a vengeance."<sup>13</sup>

The Grierson-Eliot redefinition of metaphysical poetry was further elaborated and systematized by George Williamson in 1930. The cornerstone of definition was metaphysical wit—Grierson's "peculiar blend of passion and thought," Eliot's "sensuous apprehension of thought," Herbert Read's "emotional apprehension of thought,"<sup>14</sup> Williamson's "sensuous embodiment of thought." This wit expresses itself in conceits which frequently bring together far-fetched, surprising, even shockingly dissimilar elements, fusing them nevertheless in an intensely intellectualized passion, so that, although our comprehension may be retarded,<sup>15</sup> we must learn to make the imaginative leap. On the foundation of wit and conceit, Williamson added as metaphysical characteristics the revolt against Elizabethan poetic conventions, learned, abstruse imagery, rhythmical irregularities ("astringent intellectual and masculine music"), the surprise of juxtaposed learned and colloquial language, and psychological realism. Finally, he offered the concise definition: metaphysical poetry is "complex, sensuous and intellectual as opposed to the simple, sensuous and passionate tradition."<sup>16</sup>

The critical distance between Williamson's definition and Dr. Johnson's is evidently vast; indeed, the two positions are precisely opposed. Exactly those aspects of metaphysical poetry with which Johnson had found most fault were now considered shining virtues: ingenious wit, far-fetched conceits, learned allusions, argumentative structure, complexity and subtlety, strangeness and surprises. It was patently assumed in most criticism of the next fifteen years, in spite of Grierson's and Eliot's warnings about the indiscriminate application of the school label, that metaphysical poetry was a specific body of seventeenth-century poetry written by Donne and his school.

Beginning in the mid-1940's, however, a critical movement to-

13 "Kidnapping Donne," *University of California Essays in Criticism*, II (1934), 64.

14. Herbert Read, "The Nature of Metaphysical Poetry," *The Criterion*, 1 (April, 1923), 263.

15. "... because it is necessary to get out the exact curve of Donne's mode of thinking and feeling; and that mode embraced intense passion, intellectual difficulty, and unusual imaginative connections." *Donne Tradition*, p. 84.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 57

ward a redefinition and revaluation of the nature, meaning, and sources of metaphysical poetry began to take shape. The movement may be said to span from Professor Bush's "minority report" in 1945<sup>17</sup> to Professor E. M. W. Tillyard's recent *The Metaphysicals and Milton* (London, 1956). Although Merritt Y. Hughes, in his previously quoted "Kidnapping Donne" in 1934, questioned some of the basic tenets of Mr. Williamson's *The Donne Tradition* and the critical climate which it epitomized, particularly Donne's supposed originality and his influence on other poets, it had little evident effect on the generally accepted views of metaphysical poetry in the criticism of the next decade. Professor Bush's dissent from the majority opinion, however, may have been the spark which touched off the beginnings of a critical rereading. Noting that "the degree of unlikeness among the poets who are called metaphysical . . . forbids our defining metaphysical poetry simply in terms of Donne, he severely questioned whether Donne's enormous twentieth-century reputation was as valid as had been supposed, and insisted that Donne's influence on the poets usually called metaphysical was erroneously conceived."<sup>18</sup>

A lively discussion of the sources and nature of the metaphysical style was soon in progress. Miss Rosemond Tuve attributed the style to the influence of Ramist logic and rhetoric in her *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* (Chicago, 1947.) Miss Rosemary Freeman explored the influence of the emblem books on the metaphysical style in her *English Emblem Books* (London, 1948), and Miss Ruth Wallerstein affirmed both the Ramist and emblem influences in her *Seventeenth Century Poetic* (Madison, 1950). Mr. J. B. Leishman's book on Donne, *The Monarch of Wit* (London, 1951), attempted a clearer distinction between the private, individual poetry of Donne and the public poetry of Jonson and classical school. Leishman found new dramatic overtones in Donne's style, which he wedded to the personal in the formula, "the dialectical expression of personal drama." Clay Hunt, in *Donne's Poetry* (New Haven, 1954), brought a sharp and discerning intelligence, together with a fresh and penetrating style, to bear on a new examination of some of the clichés of Donne criticism, among them, Donne's supposed unification of sensibility, his relationship to the scientific temper, the influence on his thought of his Catholic background, and his use of Petrarchan conventions for satiric purposes. Geoffrey Walton's *Metaphysical to Augustan* (London, 1955), concentrating on Cowley as the transitional figure, and rejecting the "traditional point of view" embodied in R. L. Sharpe's *Donne to Dryden*:

17. Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 1945), pp. 134-136, 526.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

*The Revolt against Metaphysical Poetry* (Chapel Hill, 1940), proposed a new interpretation of the "evolution of wit" in the seventeenth century. In rejecting Sharpe's thesis of the neo-classical revolt against metaphysical wit, Walton urged instead the neo-classical adaptation of that wit, the "centrifugal and inclusive" wit of early seventeenth-century poetry becoming in Augustan poetry "centripetal and exclusive," with Cowley standing between the two and embodying them both. Patrick Crutwell, in *The Shakespearean Moment* (New York, 1955), assayed a characterization and interpretation of the opening years of the seventeenth century as "the greatest moment in English poetry," in which the "critical, dramatic, satirical, complex and uncertain mentality" of the age flowered at once in Shakespeare's greatest dramas and Donne's and the metaphysicals' greatest poems, all in a style which has been called metaphysical but which may be called "mature Shakespearean." The central expression of that style, Mr. Crutwell held, was poetic drama, permeating both theatrical and nontheatrical poetry. Joseph Mazzeo contributed three important essays to the discussion, the first an examination of the theories of Miss Tuve, Miss Wallerstein, and those who advocate the importance of the emblematisers' influence, and the other two an advancement of his own theory of universal analogy which he calls the "poetic of correspondence," derived from Giordano Bruno's formulation of "concettismo."<sup>19</sup> Louis Martz's extended argument in *The Poetry of Meditation* for the influence of the formal religious meditation on English religious poetry of the early seventeenth century is a contribution of solid importance. Frank Warnke's questioning of the frequently attributed influence of Marino on the English metaphysicals deserves mention.<sup>20</sup>

Professor E. M. W. Tillyard entered the discussion and broadened it to include a revaluation of all the so-called Schools of seventeenth-century poetry. In his *The Metaphysicals and Milton* (London, 1956) he proposed to examine the conventional view of metaphysical poetry which opposed the metaphysicals to Milton. "People still unconsciously conceive," Mr. Tillyard explained, having instanced Mr. Williamson's *The Donne Tradition* as typical of the conventional view, "of an opposition between the Metaphysical school and Milton, in spite of a growing realization that it is perilous to talk of schools of poets at all in the first half of the seventeenth-century" (pp. 1-2). Mr. Tillyard maintained that Donne's "so-called Metaphysical followers," Herbert,

19. Joseph A. Mazzeo, "A Critique of Some Modern Theories of Metaphysical Poetry," *Modern Philology* L (1952), 88-96; "A Seventeenth-Century Theory of Metaphysical Poetry," *Romantic Review*, XLII (1951), 245-255; "Metaphysical Poetry and the Poetic of Correspondence," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XIV (1953), 221-234.

20. Frank Warnke, "Marino and the English Metaphysicals," *Studies in the Renaissance*, II (1955), 160-175.

or Carew or Vaughan, are quite alien to Donne in poetic structure and rhetoric in their characteristic poems. Milton, he felt, was not nearly so opposed to the metaphysicals as has been usually supposed. "My belief is that the opposition of the Metaphysicals to Milton is less than the opposition of the extraordinary temperament of Donne to the temperament of the other poets of his time or shortly after, whether these poets did or did not fall under the influence of Donne's rhetoric" (p. 2). In its broad purpose Mr. Tillyard conceived his book to be a contribution to the revaluation of all seventeenth-century poetry; he wished "to seek to approximate the different poets and to continue the process, already begun, of breaking down their departmentalization into schools" (p. 53).

Thus we have the discussion of the nature and characteristics of metaphysical poetry from Dryden to the present. I believe that the classic definition and delineation of metaphysical poetry laid down by Messrs. Grierson, Eliot, and Williamson, although now over a quarter-century old, has not been superseded in modern criticism, indeed, that it has hardly been basically modified. The only tentative modifications are those of Joseph Mazzeo and Louis Martz. Mr. Mazzeo's theory of the "poetic of correspondence" is pregnant with possibilities because he approaches a reappraisal of the bedrock fundamental of poetic wit. His task is not finished, however, because in his illuminating theory of the source and meaning of wit, he has not yet distinguished the "acutezza" of the metaphysicals from that of other poets—the conceit of Donne, for example, from that of Herrick. Mr. Martz's tentative modification of the classic delineation of metaphysical is as yet not directed at a reappraisal of the qualities of metaphysical poetry which the classic definition described, but rather is an attempt to provide an alternate and far richer explanation for the sources of those qualities than the "school of Donne" explanation provides. Mr. Martz's theory must be tested by scholarly discussion before its validity and influence can be determined. It is interesting that both these possible reorientations point away from England toward the continent. It seems very likely that any permanent change in the traditional view of English poetry **in the early seventeenth century** will come from our discoveries in this continental exploration.

GEORGE ROSS RIDGE  
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Georgia State College  
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A Bird And A Motto:  
Source for "Benito Cereno"

The case for proposing *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* as a source for *Benito Cereno* is of course circumstantial. It rests upon Melville's proven knowledge of Coleridge and upon the striking parallels in theme, thematic development, and imagery between the two works. But the circumstantial evidence is so extensive that it perhaps requires a greater act of faith to reject than to accept this thesis.

Melville's Reading

Commentators record Melville's early acquaintance with Coleridge. Matthiessen says that his education included many allusions to Coleridge.<sup>1</sup> Sealts notes that "the rather ostentatious allusions in *Fragments from a Writing Desk* imply his youthful familiarity with . . . Coleridge."<sup>2</sup> Weaver believes that Melville evoked Coleridge's very spirit in the *Fragments*,<sup>3</sup> and Gilman points out that Melville even quoted phrases from Coleridge's "To Genevieve."<sup>4</sup> Melville later included in a volume of verse "C---'s Lament," which was "an effort to find a kindred spirit in the author of 'Ode to Dejection.'"<sup>5</sup> Thus it is certain that, even as a schoolboy, Melville knew some of Coleridge's works. It seems that Melville continued his reading of Coleridge while he was at sea. Thorpe quotes him: "Who had the selection of these books, I do not know, but some of them must have been selected by our chaplain, who so pranced on Coleridge's *High German Horse*."<sup>6</sup> Melville engaged in

1F. O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance* (New York, 1941), p. 371.

2Merton M. Sealts, "Melville's Reading," *Harvard Library Bulletin*, II (1948), 147.

3Raymond M. Weaver, *Herman Melville* (New York, 1921), p. 121.

4W. H. Gilman, *Melville's Early Life and Redburn* (New York, 1951), p. 114.

5Leon Howard, *Herman Melville* (Berkeley, 1951), p. 333.

6Quoted in William Thorp, *Herman Melville* (New York, 1938), p. xxiv.



frequent intellectual conversations with the chaplain.

Now the man who most influenced Melville's reading was Ernest Duyckinck, "a devoted collector of books and his library . . . one of the largest then in New York." We know both that Duyckinck was a devoted admirer of Coleridge and that Melville frequently used this library.<sup>7</sup> Sealts's study of Melville's reading even contains a list of books which Melville bought or borrowed at this time. In February 1848 Melville bought a copy of *Biographia Literaria*, and this purchase, forward (p.165) baldly states, "may led to the reading of other works. Braswell notes that after his return from England Melville "made several familiar references to Coleridge and recorded in one of his journals a talk with Adler in which Coleridge's religious views figured."<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, there is a Coleridgean orientation in *Moby Dick*. Matthiessen (p.457) argues that Captain Ahab represents right reason, which, "in the Coleridgean and Emersonian terminology, is the highest range of intuitive intelligence, the gateway to divine madness." Arvin writes that Melville "had always been conscious of a conflict between the mind and the faculty of non-rational insight, between the Understanding and the Reason, as Coleridge would say."<sup>9</sup> Howard even contends (p.171) that Melville created the romantic hero Ahab from the dramatic method which Coleridge probably taught him. Surely Coleridgean philosophical currents are present in *Moby Dick*.

Melville read extensively after the publication of *Moby Dick*, and Sealts records the last reference to Coleridge. In winter 1853 Lemuel Shaw borrowed Coleridge's *Notes and Lectures upon Shakespeare and Some of the Old Poets and Dramatists with Other Literary Remains from the Boston Athenaeum*; and since Melville was then visiting his friends the Shaws, it is almost inconceivable that Melville, as an ardent admirer of both Shakespeare and Coleridge, did not read and discuss the book.

It was during this period that Melville most probably re-read Coleridge's poetry. Melville himself testifies to the power of Coleridge's verse. In describing the white whale, Ishmael says in *Moby Dick* (XLII):

Bethink thee of the albatross, whence come those clouds of spiritual wonderment and pale dread, in which that white phantom sails in all imaginations! Not Coleridge first threw that spell; but God's great, unflattering laureate, Nature.

<sup>7</sup>Geoffrey Stone, *Melville* (New York, 1949), pp. 76,77.

<sup>8</sup>William Braswell, *Melville's Religious Thought* (Durham, 1943), p. 16.

<sup>9</sup>Newton Arvin, *Herman Melville* (New York, 1950), p. 283.

And Melville adds, conclusively enough, in his own note:

But at last I awoke; and turning, asked a sailor what bird was this. A goney, he replied. Goney! I never had heard that name before; is it conceivable that this glorious thing is utterly unknown to men ashore! never! But some time after, I learned that goney was some seaman's name for albatross. So that by no possibility could Coleridge's wild rhyme have had aught to do with those mystical impressions which were mine, when I saw that bird upon our deck. For neither had I then read the Rhyme, nor knew the bird to be an albatross. Yet, in saying this, I do but indirectly burnish a little brighter the noble merit of the poem and the poet.

The admiration for Coleridge is clear. This reference proves conclusively that Melville read and was deeply moved by *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* before writing *Benito Cereno* in late 1855 or early 1856. The profound impressions left by the poem stirred in his mind as he wrote his story.

#### The Parallels

Arvin, observing that *Benito Cereno* is no less Gothic<sup>10</sup> than most of his fiction, notes that Melville's use of symbolism closely parallels Coleridge's.<sup>11</sup> Certainly this story is the symbolic record of a man who, cut off from society like the Mariner, lives in the twilight of metaphysical consciousness;<sup>12</sup> and the whole atmosphere is so strikingly similar that several critics of Melville's own time discussed the obvious parallels. Henry Chorley, for instance, wrote that "Melville's sea-creatures, calms and storms, belong to the dreamy tone of 'The Ancient Mariner,' " and that *Moby Dick* is of "the 'Ancient Mariner' pattern."<sup>13</sup> These similarities and parallels in *Moby Dick* are even more marked in *Benito Cereno*.

A brief summary of the plot is necessary, for though every student knows the *Ancient Mariner*, *Benito Cereno* has only recently been judged "The noblest short story in American literature,"<sup>14</sup> or for that matter even been widely read. It is the record of Amasa Delano, who comes across a mysterious ship in the Bay of St. Maria. Delano visits the strange vessel because it seems to be in distress. He is puzzled by the captain, Benito Cereno, and by the erratic behavior of the few whites

10Newton Arvin, "Melville and the Gothic Novel," *New England Quarterly*, XXII (1949), 33.

11Arvin, *Herman Melville*, pp. 240, 170.

12Richard Chase, "An Approach to Melville," *Partisan Review*, XIV (1947), 287.

13Jay Leyda, *The Melville Log* (New York, 1951), pp. 365, 786.

14Walter Blair, *The Literature of the United States* (Chicago, 1949), p. 550.



and many Negroes aboard. He wonders at Babo, Cereno's seemingly faithful servant, and the canvas-covered beak with the motto *Seguid vuestro jefe* (*Follow your leader*) scrawled mysteriously upon it. He at last discovers that Babo is the leader of a crew of mutinous slaves. After a struggle during which Delano's men subdue the slaves, Delano further records Babo's trial and Cereno's death.

*Benito Cereno* and the *Ancient Mariner* have obviously parallel themes and thematic development. Other factors, i.e., characterization and symbolism, contribute to the total impression of stronger influence in these parallels. Cosmic love is, of course, the theme in both works. In the *Ancient Mariner* the law of love is broken through the irrational slaying of the albatross; in *Benito Cereno*, through the inhumanity of slavery and the inhuman revenge taken by the mutinous slaves.

Both writers got their background material from actual voyages. Though Coleridge's poem is based on his friend Cruikshank's dream, the albatross, as a unifying symbol, is taken from Shelvocke's *Voyages*, in which the author describes how an albatross once followed his ship for several days and prompted a superstitious sailor, who thought the bird responsible for the bad weather, to shoot it. Coleridge further got many sea-descriptions from Anson's *Voyage round the World*.<sup>15</sup> For *Benito Cereno* Melville relied upon an incident in Amasa Delano's *Narrative of Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres*,<sup>16</sup> although the source of the story was so obscure that it was identified only seventy years later.<sup>17</sup> Delano's work, from which Melville included parts of actual legal documents, was published in 1817. But Melville gave the actual incident, like Coleridge, his own symbolical, Gothic touch—a touch which left the indelible imprint, moreover, of Coleridge himself.

The protagonists, the Mariner and Cereno, are similar in appearance and behavior. Both have suffered deep psychic wounds which isolate them from humanity. The Mariner is a man with a "long grey beard and glittering eye," with "skinny hand, so brown," and with a body "long, lank, and brown." Cereno's mind "seemed unstrung, if not still more seriously affected." He moved about "at times suddenly pausing, starting, or staring, biting his lip, biting his fingernail, flushing, paling, twitching his beard. He was rather tall, but seemed never to have been robust, and now with nervous suffering was almost worn to a skeleton." His hands were long, skinny, yellow. Indeed, the Mariner and Cereno were blood-brothers, or even the same incarnation in different works.

15J. L. Lowes, *Road to Xanadu* (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), pp. 226, 493.

16Harold H. Schudder, "Melville's *Benito Cereno* and Captain Delano's Voyage," *PMLA*, XLIII (June 1928), 502-32.

17Stone, p. 217.

The thematic development is parallel in the two works. Essentially both poem and story begin with the real, even the prosaically real, then move rapidly into the supernatural (or the mysterious and partially explained), and as suddenly return to the prosaically real world of actual event. The Mariner begins his statement with a simple, ominous statement, deceptively prosaic: "There was a ship." From this point suspense steadily mounts as the Mariner tells about the albatross and its brutal murder, with the increasingly supernatural elements of the becalming, the thirst of the crew, the skeleton craft, Death and Death-in-Life, the death of the mariners, the awful solitude, the release of the albatross from the Mariner, the return of the ship's spirits, the demons, the sinking of the ship, and finally at the end of the crescendo, the curse itself. After the climax the poem drops fast into the realistic realm, and the reader falls back into daily life. The poem closes, as it opens, with a wedding, the symbol of earthly love, but also a prosaic detail for all the metaphysics which it masks.

Melville's technique is identical. Delano observes simply that "the morning was one peculiar to that coast," evoking the same homely yet foreboding impression as Coleridge. Suspense heightens as Delano watches the strange ship approach, just as the Mariner watches the skeleton craft draw up. The ship is strangely deserted in both instances. Cereno's ship even has a white noddy, a bird like the albatross, perched in the rigging. The ship's beak is covered with ghostly canvas under which is scrawled *Seguid vuestro jefe*. The supernatural, or in this case the mysterious and the unexplained, is evident from the moment Delano boards the strange ship. He encounters slaves picking junk and polishing hatchets. He finds a seemingly insane captain and is puzzled by the inexplicable Babo. There is a brawl between black and white in which the slave is not punished. A chained Negro arrogantly refuses to ask for pardon. Many other incidents portend doom: the cutting of the seaman's knot; Babo shaving Cereno with the Spanish flag as a towel; the awkward meal eaten under Babo's scrutiny. A skeleton is concealed under the beak of the ship, and the motto has metaphysical referents. After the struggle between Delano's crew and the slaves, the Gothic atmosphere of metaphysical unreality is replaced by the real, by even prosaic events. The legal harangues of the trial, for instance, serve to bring the reader back to the sane, the normal, the usual.

There are even parallels in description. Coleridge describes grayness in the following verses:

And now there came both mist and snow.

Whiles all the night through fog-smoke white

That brought the fog and mist

Through the fog it came.

He establishes mood by the color gray in other scenes, just as Melville later achieves his atmosphere:

Everything gray. The sea . . . seemed fixed and was sleeked at the surface like waved lead . . . . The sky seemed a gray surtout . . . . Shadows present . . . .

The bird is a cardinal symbol in both the poem and the story. Coleridge says of the albatross: "In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud, It perched." Melville records of Cereno's ship:

Those tops hung overhead like three ruinous aviaries, in one of which was seen perched on a ratlin, a white noddy, a strange bird.

Mystery ships and crews are Gothic motifs surcharged with metaphysical meaning in both works. Coleridge describes the approach of his spectral ship:

At first it seemed a little speck,  
And then it seemed a mist;

A speck, a mist, a shape, I wist!  
And still it neared and neared:  
It plunged and tracked and veered.

The scene is comparable with the approach of Cereno's *San Dominick*:

With no small interest, Captain Delano continued to watch her—a proceeding not much facilitated by the vapors partly mantling the hull, through which the far matin light from her cabin steamed equivocally enough; much like the sun—by this time hemisphered on the rim of the horizon, and, apparently, in company with the strange ship, entering the harbor—which, wimpled by the same low, creeping clouds, showed not unlike a Lima *intriguante's* one sinister eye peering across the Plaza from the Indian loop-hole of her dusk *saya-y-manta* . . . . Ere long it seemed hard to decide whether she meant to come in or no—what she wanted, or what she was about.

The Mariner says as the spectral ship approaches:

When that strange shape drove suddenly  
Betwixt us and the Sun.

And straight the Sun was flecked with bars,  
 As if through a dungeon-grate he peered  
 With broad and burning face.

Delano thinks as Cereno's ship approaches:

Upon gaining a less remote view, the ship, when made signally visible on the verge of the leaden-hued swells . . . appeared like a white-washed monastery after a thunderstorm, seen perched upon some dun cliff among the Pyrenees.

Both crews are sinister. After the Mariner's crew die, their spirits return to sail the ship home. They make no noise and work like automata:

The helmsman steered, the ship moved on;  
 The mariners all 'gan work the ropes,  
 Where they were wont to do;  
 They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—  
 We were a ghastly crew.

Melville depicts the *San Dominick* crew:

They each . . . were picking the junk into oakum, a small heap of which lay by their sides. They accompanied the task with a continuous, low, monotonous chant. . . . The six hatchet-polishers neither spoke to others, nor breathed a whisper among themselves.

To add to the mystery of Cereno's crew, Melville records the fight for which no one is punished, the strange silence of the Spanish sailors, the old seaman's attempt to communicate through the knot of rope, and the absence of a helmsman. There are further parallels, too numerous to enumerate, of both diction and imagery.

The Mariner and Cereno are both suffering heroes. His ship-mates curse the Mariner as they die, for he has sinned against cosmic law by killing the albatross. Cereno suffers from the slave insurrection because, as a slave-trader, he has been inhuman to his fellow-man. Cereno and the Mariner have both broken the universal law of love. Both must expiate through suffering and through recounting their experiences to others: the Mariner to the wedding-guest, Cereno to Delano. The didactic element is a theme throughout both works, and it is, moreover, the same theme—a sermon on human and cosmic love.

Each work has its unifying symbol. The albatross thematically unifies the *Ancient Mariner*, while the motto *Seguid Vuestro jefe*, refer-

ing to the murdered white man, unifies *Benito Cereno*. Both are actual corpses, literal and metaphysical reminders of man's failure to love God and his fellow man. Both cadavers are there for all to see, to wonder about, and in the end to be changed by. Both symbols, in short, serve the identical pivotal functions in poem and short story.

#### Summary

Thus *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is a source for *Benito Cereno*, a source not of minor but rather of major influence. The question may arise, at this time, whether Melville was consciously imitating, or indebted to, Coleridge. In this light it can be said that every writer draws, however unconsciously, upon the psychic material of his own experience, much of which is comprised by literature he has read and admired. Such is certainly the case with Melville.

The facts are clear. Melville began to read Coleridge as a boy and continued his study as a man. He further admired *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in most glowing terms, and this shortly before he wrote *Benito Cereno*. The striking parallels of theme, thematic development, imagery, symbolism, metaphysical message are too numerous and glaring to ignore. To assume that the *Ancient Mariner* is not a source for *Benito Cereno*, one must disregard the fact that Melville inordinately loved Coleridge's poem, and brush aside all these striking parallels between the works as mere coincidences. Such an assumption may perhaps be true. But it ignores all the known facts and it discounts every writer's indebtedness, however unconscious it may be, to the literature he has read, loved, and absorbed. It ultimately requires a greater act of faith, we believe, to reject than to accept the notion that the *Ancient Mariner* is a source for *Benito Cereno*.

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## Henry James's America: Versions of Oppression

Though there seems little more that can be said about the advantages and disadvantages of Henry James's expatriation to his career as an artist, criticism can still deal profitably with James's use of America as a theme in fiction. Moreover, with the belated discovery of *The Ivory Tower* and *The American Scene*, it is now recognized that James's writing contains a store of insights into American society and the American character. However, James's earlier works also delineate a coherent and extensive picture of American life. In his novels and tales of the eighteen-seventies and eighties, James has written moral criticism of American society interesting both in itself and for the light it casts on James. Through such characters as Isabel Archer and Christopher Newman James has dramatized the spiritual capacities of the American character; but the other side of the coin is James's vision of evil in America. It is this aspect of James's fiction that I am concerned with in this paper.

In his international fiction James identifies both good and evil with specific nations and cultures; more precisely, there are versions of good and evil peculiarly American, and versions peculiarly European. Though the Europeans are no match for the Americans in matters of ethical conduct, both have their generic malignities. Thus it is far from adequate to hold that James's America is good and his Europe evil, though it is generally true that the evil of Europe is more prominent than that of America. Actually James gains variety and subtlety in his international fiction through his concern with the many forms of evil he finds in American life, while there is a certain sameness and melodramatic obviousness in his treatment of the evil of Europe.

As complexity is the most obvious characteristic of James's Europe, simplicity is the most striking feature of his America. It is a simplicity that excludes not only all the social and cultural advantages



catalogued in the well-known passage in James's *Hawthorne*, but also the evil inherent in traditional society. In "An International Episode," two English visitors to Newport gain impressions of

images of early breezy shining hours on lawns and piazzas that overlooked the sea, of innumerable pretty girls saying innumerable quaint and familiar things; of infinite lounging and talking and laughing and flirting and lunching and dining; of a confidence that broke down, of a freedom that pulled up, nowhere; of an idyllic ease that was somehow too ordered for a primitive social consciousness and too innocent for a developed; of occasions on which they so knew every one and every thing that they almost ached with reciprocity; of drives and rides in late afternoon, over gleaming beaches, on long tea-tables, on the return, informal, irregular, agreeable; of evenings at open windows or on the perpetual verandahs, in the summer starlight, above the warm Atlantic and amid irrelevant outbursts of clever minstrelsy . . . . It was the book of life, of American life, at least, with the chapter of "complications" bodily omitted.<sup>1</sup>

The simple beauty of the idyllic pastoral scene is consistent with, if not symbolic of, the innocence of its inhabitants. At its best James's America is a kind of Eden, in which refinement, intelligence, and morality are natural endowments, uninhibited by any external social or religious code. This to James is the perfectly organic society, for there can be no distinction between man as social creature and man as individual. Society derives its character from the individuals comprising it; no system of manners or morals shapes the members or limits them.

In *A Small Boy and Others* (New York, 1913), in which he recollects the charm of the America of his youth, James speaks of his cousin Helen as a representative of this uncomplicated society: "I note with appreciation that she was strenuously, actively good, and have the liveliest impression both that no one was ever better, and that her goodness somehow testifies for the whole tone of a society, a remarkable cluster of private decencies" (p.122). Some pages later James writes, "The social scheme, as we knew it, was, in its careless charity, worthy of the golden age . . ." (p.161). The merit of this ideal American society is that its principles of conduct are private rather than public, spontaneous rather than cultivated, simple rather than complex; in the narrow sense of the word, it is no society at all, rather a kind of anarchy: "How as

<sup>1</sup>The *Novels and Tales of Henry James*, The New York Edition, XIV (New York 1907-1909), 320. Hereafter referred to as NT.

mere detached unaccompanied infants we enjoyed such impunity of range and confidence of welcome is beyond comprehension save by the light of the old [American] manners and conditions, the old local bonhomie, the comparatively primal innocence, the absence of complications . . ." (p.234).

The America of "An International Episode" and *Notes of a Son and Brother*, as well as other of James's works, is the idealized myth, the America of the romance, concerned more with spiritual than surface truth; and, as R. W. B. Lewis has made clear in *The American Adam* (p.152-155), the mythology is Adamic. The central reality beneath the romantic surface is the innocence of the Americans, an innocence nurtured and guarded by the very lack of "a complex social machinery"<sup>2</sup> that James found necessary for the artist. But if freedom and innocence are negative virtues, they are inestimable ones and abound in "a little world of easy and happy interchange, of unrestricted and yet all so instinctively sane and secure association and conversation, with all its liberties and delicacies, all its mirth and earnestness protected and directed so much more from within than from without . . ."<sup>3</sup>

Aside from the simple and innocent America of the Adamic myth, there is also the America of oppression in James's work. In the main James finds evil, like good, to be the product of freedom: it is an effect of self-coercion rather than external pressure. It is the moral sense gone wrong and innocence perverted; it comes from a consideration of American negations as fulfillments and inflexible codes. In extreme, the evil of America is an intense provincialism that breeds aggressive narrow-mindedness; in moderation it is a complacent ignorance of the value of foreign experience.

The New England conscience, even though James frequently exposes it comically, is a source of evil in his fiction. Through Benjamin Babcock of *The American* James parodies the excessive moral timidity of the overdeveloped conscience, but even in the case of Babcock there is evidence of an evil, for though his short-sightedness is foolish to Christopher Newman it is oppressive to Babcock, who is attracted to art by his aesthetic sensibilities and pulled away from it by his inclination to suspect all pleasure and beauty.

In *The Europeans* the Puritan temperament is for the most part either absurd or quaint. A characteristic touch is the conversation between Mr. Wentworth, with his inherited distrust of art and leisure, and

<sup>2</sup>Hawthorne (New York, 1897), p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>*Notes of a Son and Brother* (New York, 1914), p. 458.

the European Felix Young, who requests that he be allowed to paint the old man's portrait:

"I think sitting for one's portrait is only one of the various forms of idleness," said Mr. Wentworth. "Their name is legion."

"My dear sir," cried Felix, "you can't be said to idle when you are making a man work so!"

"One might be painted while one is asleep," suggested Mr. Brand, as a contribution to the discussion.<sup>4</sup>

The Wentworth household is ruled by a fixed idea. Here is a case in which innocence does not imply freedom; the family's hostility to free experience makes moral maturity impossible. There is only physical freedom among the Wentworths, no intellectual freedom. A number of death images suggest the real condition of the family: Felix tells his sister, "My uncle, Mr. Wentworth. . . looks as if he were undergoing martyrdom, not by fire, but by freezing"; later Felix "perceived that there was something almost cadaverous in his uncle's highfeatured white face"; to the Baroness, Felix's sister, "Gertrude seemed. . . most funereal . . ." (pp. 35,38,39).

The Wentworths' rigid morality, which just falls short of being intolerance, expresses their fear of experience. Since life is tainted by evil, the Wentworths choose not to live at all; they shelter themselves from their European guests, who in turn invite them to share in the happiness and fullness of their lives. Felix Young is the normative character, opposed on the one hand by his sister, an adventuress who is not above deception, and on the other by the Wentworths, who equate happiness with evil. Felix admires the freshness but regrets the gloominess of the Americans. He tells Gertrude,

"You seem to me very well placed, for enjoying. You have money and liberty and what is called in Europe a 'position.'

"One ought to think it bright and charming and delightful, eh?" asked Gertrude.

"I should say so—if one can. It is true it all depends on that," Felix added.

"You know there is a great deal of misery in the world," said his model.

"I have seen a little of it," the young man rejoined. "But it was all over there—beyond the sea. I don't see any here. This is a paradise."

.....

<sup>4</sup>*The Europeans* (London, 1921), pp. 74-75.

"To 'enjoy,'" [Gertrude said] "to take life—no! painfully, must one do something wrong?"

Felix gave his long light laugh again. "Seriously, I think not. And for this reason, among others: you strike me as very capable of enjoying, if the chances were given you, and yet at the same time as incapable of wrong-doing" (pp.77-78).

Among the Americans in *The Europeans*, only Gertrude breaks away from the stiff moral environment to seek a fuller experience; she marries Felix and goes with him to Europe, where conceivably her innate virtue and intelligence will be allowed to mature. Mr. Wentworth is beyond salvation; he is, as Felix observes, spiritually dead. Charlotte, Gertrude's sister, and Mr. Brand, the clergyman who unsuccessfully courted Gertrude, are alike unchanged by the Europeans and remain incapable of moral growth. Robert Acton, a neighbor of the Wentworths but apparently far more liberal and sophisticated than they, is equally subdued by his conscience. He falls in love with the Baroness Eugenia and thinks of marrying her. The Baroness, whose motive in visiting her relatives is to gain a fortune, would welcome the marriage, for Acton is very wealthy. Acton rejects the Baroness when he discovers that she is capable of lying; but the Baroness' lies are harmless, usually motivated by good manners. As Rebecca West points out, "poor Eugenia fails altogether in an environment where a lie from her lips is not treated as *un petit peche d'une petite femme*, but remains simply a lie."<sup>5</sup> Acton is really worse than the Wentworths in that he is compelled by conscience to chastise others as well as shelter himself.

In Acton's repudiation of the Baroness, the inflexible virtue of the New Englander has become perverted and destructive; negative virtue has become active evil. For the most part the New England conscience is evil only to the extent that it prohibits experience. But it cannot be assumed that such an abstract basis of morality as the Wentworths' remains simply quaint when transferred to foreign soil or when influenced by alien codes. Thus Gertrude shows that she has no adequate substitute for the discipline she has abandoned. The New England morality is the only morality she knows; she has no personal resources to fall back upon. James clearly shows that the marriage of Gertrude and Felix is far from an ideal union of American innocence and European experience, for Gertrude from the start uses her new found freedom to injure the representatives of the old code. She crudely insults Mr. Brand and Charlotte, and is brash and inconsiderate to everyone. It is not sim-

<sup>5</sup>Henry James (New York, 1916), p. 42.

ply that Gertrude knows nothing of delicacy or tact, but that she is unable to reconcile her old standards of moral decency with the exuberant experience that Felix makes attainable.

*The Europeans* ends when Gertrude marries, and we are not told what she experiences in Europe. But in "A London Life," there is an American woman very much like Gertrude whose response to her European experience reveals the grave limitations in American innocence. Laura Wing, a young sheltered American with a New England conscience, visits her sister in London, where she finds herself in the midst of a thoroughly scandalous situation: her sister and brother-in-law are both openly engaged in adultery. Laura is shocked and on the point of collapse. But her conduct surpasses indignation: to keep herself above any suspicion of impropriety she hysterically exhorts her relatives to reform and crudely tries to persuade a young American to marry her. James's opinion of his heroine is necessarily ambiguous, however, for as the center of consciousness in the story the righteous Laura is not inclined to question her own conduct. There is only one occasion (NTX, 12-13) when Laura considers that her interference might be reprehensible:

Was she all wrong after all—was she cruel by being too rigid? . . . ought she only to propose to herself to "allow" more and more, and to allow ever, and to smooth things down by gentleness, by sympathy, by not looking at them too hard? It was not the first time the just measure seemed to slip from her hands as she became conscious of possible, or rather of very actual, differences of standard and usage.

Laura, however, chooses intervention over endurance. Though her reckless attempts at reform are explicable in terms of her emotionally starved and morally rigorous past, Laura has something in common with the sophisticated evil-doers of *The American* and *The Portrait of a Lady*: that is, she will not be content until she imposes her own narrow standards upon others. It is nearly an inflexible rule in James's fiction that regardless of one's intentions he must respect the freedom of others. Through her meddling Laura brings shame and hostility only to herself, yet she demonstrates the potential power for evil in the innocent who takes it upon himself to generalize from his own creed and to judge and reform others.

The New England ethos is more specifically under attack in *The Bostonians*. Oliver Chancellor's devotion to the abstract cause of woman's rights leads her to frustrate the impressionable Verena Tarrant's impulses to love. Oppression is clearly the dominant mood of *The Bostonians*. As opposed to the fresh and open scene of *The Europeans*, the

settings in *The Bostonians* are for the most part musty and enclosed. In Olive's parlor the hero, Basil Ransom, thinks he has "never seen an interior that was so much an interior, as this queer corridor-shaped drawingroom of his new-found kinswoman . . ."<sup>6</sup> Most of the story takes place in such rooms, or in narrow low-ceilinged lecture-halls, where the audience has "an anxious, haggard look, though there were sundry exceptions—half a dozen placid, florid faces" (p.25). Boston itself is cold, decayed, and drab:

The western windows of Olive's drawing room, looking over the water, took in the red sunsets of winter; the long, low bridge that crawled, on its staggering posts, across the Charles; the casual patches of ice and snow; the desolate suburban horizons, peeled and made bald by the rigour of the season; the general hard, cold void of the prospect; the extrusion, at Charleston, at Cambridge, of a few chimnies and steeples, straight, sordid tubes of factories and engine shops, or spare, heavenward finger of the New England meeting house. There was something inexorable in the poverty of the scene, shameful in the meanness of its details, which gave a collective impression of boards and tin and frozen earth, sheds and rotting piles, and tracks of the humbler, the universal horse-car, traversing obliquely this path of danger; loose fences, vacant lots, mounds of refuse, yards bestrewn with iron pipes, telegraph poles, and bare wooden backs of places. (p.149)

Ransom attempts to liberate Verena from Olive and from Boston. Symbolically his meetings with her occur in parks or on the Harvard campus, where Verena can not only breathe fresh air, but also enjoy a freedom from the movement which supports her liberty. The central situation of Olive's repression of Verena, not to mention her far more perverse self-repression, fuses with the New England urban setting to expose the moral decay of Boston in a way that looks forward to poetic treatments of the same theme by T. S. Eliot and Robert Lowell.

In his remark that "the society of Boston was and is quite uncivilized but refined beyond the point of civilization. . .," T. S. Eliot<sup>7</sup> refers to the New England tendency to dissociate morality from experience, the same habit of mind which James exposes in *The Europeans*. In *The Bostonians* he exposes a later generation of New Englanders, involved in post Civil War urbanization and commercialism, rabidly pro-

<sup>6</sup>*The Bostonians* (New York, 1945), pp. 12-13.

<sup>7</sup>"On Henry James," *The Question of Henry James*, ed. F. W. Dupee (New York, 1945), p. 113.



gressive rather than primly conservative. The Calvinistic zeal has found political and secular expression. But, to return to Eliot's observation, the moral and social barbarism of the Boston which James depicts is but the outgrowth of the refinement of a slightly earlier stage of New England culture. In neither era has the New England conscience adapted itself to the demands of personal liberty and social experience.

The world represented by Verena Tarrant's parents is the world of money. In their gross commercialism, Selah Tarrant, a fake mesmerist who exploits his daughter's public speaking ability, and his wife, a tawdry social climber who hopes to crash society through Olive's adoption (actually a purchase) of his daughter, reveal the ultimate corruption of New England Puritanism. The Tarrants seem remote from both the serene dignity of the Wentworths and the misguided idealism of Olive. If Mr. Wentworth and Olive represent a society which has abstracted ethics from experience and morals from manners, the Tarrants represent a society supported by neither ethics nor manners. They repel both morally and aesthetically. They are the end product of a people who have never been able to reconcile the demands of the world with those of religion.

When morals go wrong in New England, and to some degree in America as a whole, James implies, the result is an intolerable *vulgarity* as well as a destructive evil. For the most part James's European male-factors pay great heed to manners, to a civilized style; indeed they repeatedly sacrifice conscience to form. But New England has a long tradition of hostility to beauty, and thus when it changes from a leisurely to an acquisitive society it can only be vulgar. In good and evil alike, the New Englander has no concern for appearances; they always correspond with reality.

The Tarrants, therefore, are an implicit criticism of the New England mind. But more specifically they cast a shadow on the liberalism of Miss Birdseye, Olive, and their fellow enthusiasts. The Tarrants are knaves and the others fools, but both mesmerism and feminism oppress the innocent, Verena, and both are condemned by the wise witness, Ransom.

The Tarrants are perhaps the most appalling example of vulgarity in James's fiction, mainly because their lack of any aesthetic sense is all but identical with their lack of any moral sense. This, however, is using the term "vulgarity" in a simpler way than James himself uses it. "Vulgarity," in his fiction, is a term of both moral and aesthetic disapprobation. James frequently describes moral or immoral conduct in aesthetic terminology: "ugly" is almost synonymous with "evil"; and "beautiful" with "good." This practice, however, should not be interpreted to mean that James considers vulgarity *per se* evil, and refinement

*per se* good. It is incorrect to assume with H. R. Hays that "James really felt that bad manners was worse than murder,"<sup>8</sup> or with Ernest A. Baker that in James's fiction "Vulgarity is the flesh and the devil."<sup>9</sup> James is in the tradition not of Oscar Wilde ("It is absurd to divide people into good and bad. People are either charming or tedious") but in the tradition of Emerson ("Beauty is the mark God sets upon virtue").

In James's fiction vulgarity is mainly an American trait. At times it accompanies provincialism, as with the unsophisticated and self-satisfied Marcellus Cockerel of "The Point of View," who complacently rejects all of Europe: "They talk about things that we've settled ages ago, and the solemnity with which they propound to you their little embarrassment makes a heavy draft on one's good nature" (NT, XIV, 599). At other times vulgarity indicates moral savagery. Just as the bad manners of Verena Tarrant's parents reflect their greed, fraudulence, and indecency, so George Flack, an American correspondent for the scandal sheet "The Reverberator," in the story of the same name, has a brashness and indelicacy which mirror his moral corruption. As a journalist—one of many in James, all of whom (except Merton Densher) commit the arch crime of invading privacy—he delights in betraying confidences and exposing secrets. It is difficult to point out where Flack's vulgarity—his passions for money, scandal, and publicity—ends and where his immorality—his violation of privacy—begins; he is vulgar because he is immoral and immoral because he is vulgar.

Frequently vulgarity is accompanied by acquisitiveness, not the desire for experience, for the sense of the past, or for happiness which incites so many of James's American heroines on their European pilgrimages, but simply a greed for things. The wife and daughter of Mr. Ruck, the American business man in "The Pension Beaurepas" are devastating caricatures of a century of American women tourists in Europe, armed with cameras and checkbooks, and blind to all but size and quantity. James's treatment, however, goes beyond caricature, for he reveals in the Ruck women a vicious selfishness and an unquenchable avarice that horrify rather than amuse. Mrs. Ruck and her daughter wish simply to buy Europe—to get as many of its clothes and jewels as possible. James dramatizes the sordid as well as the preposterous nature of this undertaking by showing the effect of the lavish spending on the pitiable husband. As one of the characters in the story says,

To get something in a "store" that they can put on their backs—

<sup>8</sup>"Henry James, the Satirist," *Hound and Horn*, VII (April-May, 1934), p. 516.  
<sup>9</sup>*The History of the English Novel* (London, 1938), IX, 516.

that's their one idea; they haven't another in their heads. Of course they spend no end of money, and they do it with implacable persistence, with a mixture of audacity and cunning. They do it in his teeth and they do it behind his back; the mother protects the daughter, while the daughter eggs on the mother. Between them they're bleeding him to death. (NT,XIV,460)

Vulgarity and immorality both stem from the same source, a fundamental blindness to all but the grossest of values. The Ruck women's tastelessness is but the converse of their disrespect for Mr. Ruck. Virtue always stands in some relation to awareness in James. In some cases aesthetic awareness may exist without moral awareness (for example, in Gilbert Osmond and Mrs. Gareth); in other cases a commonplace moral awareness may exist without aesthetic awareness (for example, in Henrietta Stackpole and Owen Gareth); but James's superior creatures combine the two (for example, Isabel Archer and Fleda Vetch). If the highest morality requires the unified sensibility, the basest immorality often results from some kind of imbalance between the aesthetic and the moral understanding, or from a deficiency in both.

The inoffensive vulgarians in James, those with a kind of moral sense, are agents of a mild evil. They oppress themselves. For good is necessarily imperfect in James unless it masters experience; and the vulgar by definition are incapable of experience. They see life superficially and they cannot participate in the refining and maturing process which the complex civilization offers. "Daisy Miller" is a story in which an apparently inoffensive, even charming, vulgarity is a moral limitation. Most commentators have stressed the victory of American innocence over narrow European standards. But Daisy does not profit from her experience; she is a pure child of nature, whose response to trivial and grave challenges alike is impulsive. Without reflection Daisy disregards the dicta of the American colony in Rome that she should not appear in public with a gentleman unescorted, that she should not violate curfews, that she should not treat her courier as an equal. Daisy "does what she likes" because there is no other motivation in her simple nature. Innocent and good as she is, she has no moral, not to mention aesthetic, consciousness. She has neither receptivity nor potency. Her European travels, her relation to Winterbourne and to the offended Americans, and her indifference to convention are ultimately meaningless to her. She is a person on whom everything is lost.

The business man in James has the same basic deficiency. Though James confessed that his inadequate knowledge of "the huge organized mystery of the consummately, the supremely applied money-

passion" precluded his treating "nineteen-twentieths"<sup>10</sup> of American city life, another reason is probably James's belief that for the business man the "money-passion" is the only passion, that his business denies him the physical and intellectual freedom necessary for the enriching experience of Europe. Daisy Miller's father remains in Schenectady making money; Mr. Dosson of "The Reverberator," when not sitting idly in his hotel room, likes Europe because he can spend part of his large fortune there: "he was never content on any occasion unless a great deal of money was spent. . ." (NT,XIII,50). Business is not a base activity to James until such late works as "The Jolly Corner" and *The Ivory Tower*, but in his early fiction it consistently stifles the spirit and the sensibilities. Ferner Nuhn, among other critics, has commented on James's "curious attitude toward money, which made the possession of worldly means—and a comfortable amount of it!—virtually a prerequisite for the good life, but the acquisition of it an almost necessarily damning activity."<sup>11</sup> The possession of money is a condition of freedom, and the earning of it a condition of slavery.

Thus money making, like the New England conscience and provincial vulgarity, causes or reflects the deadened consciousness. An apt illustration (NT,XIV,460,440) is Mr. Ruck of "The Pension Beaurepas," described by a fellow tourist as "a broken-down man of business. He's broken-down in health and I think he must be broken-down in fortune. He has spent his whole life in buying and selling and watching prices, so that he knows how to do nothing else." There is some comedy in Mr. Ruck's pathetic incompatibility with the leisurely and cultured life in Europe: "Well, we certainly saw the cathedral. I don't know as we are any the better for it, and I don't know as I should know it again. But we saw it anyway, stone by stone—and I heard about it century by century." But there is minor tragedy in the old man's approaching bankruptcy as his wife and daughter spend the last of his dollars on clothes and jewelry which they will never use. Mr. Ruck is figuratively and literally killed by money, by the possession of it and by the lack of it.

In James's early work the wealthy business man is usually seen as an innocent soul spiritually blighted by his work. The unsuccessful business man, however, is most often a conniver and a scoundrel. George Fenton of *Watch and Ward* and Morris Townsend of *Washington Square*, both failures in business, try to marry for money. When James returned to the American scene in his later years his critical insight into

<sup>10</sup>*The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* by Henry James, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York, 1934), p. 274.

<sup>11</sup>"The Enchanted Kingdom of Henry James," *The Wind Blew from the West* (New York, 1942), p. 93.

the nature of business deepened, so that he went beyond the rather limited—and unmistakably middle class—attitude of regarding business success as a certain key to morality and business failure as a clear indication of immorality.

Fenton and Townsend are exceptions, however, to the general rule that evil in American life comes from prohibition and restraint, rather than aggression and intervention. Thus commercialism is usually a negative rather than a positive evil: it is hostile to experience and moral development. All of James's Americans who commit themselves to a specific code or cause—whether it be New England Puritanism, feminism, commercialism, or nationalism—are incompletely human. And in this respect James shares the belief of his philosopher-theologian father, who, as his novelist son was to write, insisted that "What we were to do. . . was just to be something, something unconnected with specific doing, something free and uncommitted, something finer in short than *being that*, whatever it was, might consist of."<sup>12</sup> Those who chose to be something specific are unable to be themselves; by adhering to an external system they unfit themselves to live the inner life.

James's fictional portraits of America and Americans give abundant support to the observation of M. D. Zabel that "The American mind, rooted in hereditary conscience, had never escaped its hauntings by darker powers, its stirring of ancestral guilt, what Howells was presently to call 'the slavery implicated in our liberty'."<sup>13</sup> Some of James's stories imply the existence of an evil inherent in American life beyond individual control and considerably less tangible than the various evils of commerce, vulgarity, and Puritanism, although it is perhaps the ultimate source of them. As is often the case, James is more explicit in defining this evil in his autobiography than in his fiction. For example, in remembering his American youth in *A Small Boy and Others*, he reflects on "the relics of those we have seen beaten," on "the chronicles of early deaths, arrested careers, broken promises, orphaned children" (p.14), and on those who "in spite of brilliant promise and romantic charm, ended badly, as badly as possible" (p.47). Pertinently, Van Wyck Brooks writes, "To the end of his life. . . America, to James, signified destruction and failure. It was the dark country, where the earth was a quicksand, where amiable uncles ended in disaster, where men were turned into machines, where genius was subject to all sorts of inscrutable catastrophes."<sup>14</sup> James interpreted the failures and disasters of his

<sup>12</sup>*A Small Boy and Others*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>13</sup>*Craft and Character in Modern Fiction* (New York, 1957), p. 123.

<sup>14</sup>*The Pilgrimage of Henry James* (New York, 1925), p. 29.



friends and relatives as somehow symbolic of an intrinsic treachery in America.<sup>15</sup>

Thus the evil of America in "A Passionate Pilgrim," "Europe," "Four Meetings," and *Washington Square* cannot be explained as the effect of self-suppression; the protagonists of these stories are suppressed by various external, rather than internal, agencies. In commenting on *The Portrait of a Lady*, Pelham Edgar complains (rather unreasonably) that

There is not much to be gained by portraying a woman with a mind, if that mind is ultimately to be cramped in its opportunity for growth, nor in emphasizing the value of experience, if experience is to lead in the end to a spiritual prison in which the natural impulses of the heart must suffer an inevitable decay.<sup>16</sup>

According to his own standards, Edgar should find even more intolerable those James stories in which persons of sensibility and intelligence must accept spiritual imprisonment from the start. Such characters are never allowed to reach the point where they can choose to renounce or accept happiness; they are thwarted, not by free will, but by something like fate.

One example is Clement Searle, the decayed, brittle, and sensitive hero of "A Passionate Pilgrim," who is deprived of his hereditary right to an English manor by a proud cousin who schemes to keep the estate in his own hands. Because he is poor, Searle is unable to leave America. His bad health symbolizes the effect of American life on his spirit. When Searle finally comes to England, believing he can recover his estate, the incivility of the British relative is all that is needed to kill both body and spirit. Searle, then, who requires a richness of culture and manners to sustain his fine consciousness, is to a large degree destroyed by the aesthetic poverty of America.

"Four Meetings" and "Europe" are slight and ironic stories of frustration; each deals with a young woman of imagination and intelli-

<sup>15</sup> It has often been pointed out that James regards orphanage, like money, an essential condition of freedom for his feminine protagonists. Isabel Archer, Fleda Vetch, and Milly Theale are parentless; the parent in James is invariably a severe limitation, as, for example, with Catherine Sloper, Nanda Brookenham, and Maggie Verver. Marius Bewley, "Henry James and 'Life,'" *The Hudson Review*, XI (Summer, 1958), in discussing the short story "Europe," observes that "The image of the Mother, usually a life-symbol, is in this story a symbol of life-in-death" (179). Nonetheless, orphanage has a double-meaning for James. In *The Wings of the Dove*, for instance, James identifies the catastrophes that have devastated Milly Theale's family with the doom that awaits Milly. The same basic situation exists, though less obviously, in many of James's works.

<sup>16</sup> Henry James: *Man and Author* (Boston and New York, 1927), pp. 249-250.



gence who is prevented—in “Four Meetings” by inadequate finances and in “Europe” by family obligations—from going to Europe, an experience which, James implies, is necessary for the spiritual and intellectual growth of each. The irony in these stories is that the generosity of these two women keeps them from fulfilling their ambitions. Jane Rimmle, who has an intense “sense of life,” wastes away in New England caring for her mother, who is constantly ill but never dies; Caroline Spencer, a New England schoolteacher, uses her life savings to take a trip to Europe, but she gets only as far as The Havre, where she gives her money to her worthless cousin so that he may pay his debts.

Catherine Sloper of *Washington Square* is James's most fully realized portrait of the person frustrated by external forces. Catherine is coerced by her father, who if not a tyrant is a cold-blooded analyst who trades upon the respect Catherine has for him, by Miss Penniman, her witless and meddlesome aunt, and by Morris Townsend, the adventurer who wants to marry the unattractive Catherine for her money. Catherine is betrayed by her innocence and unawareness and by the essentially well-intentioned interference of her father and aunt as much as she is by the deceit of Townsend. Unlike most of James's heroines, Catherine is not allowed the freedom to make a mistake. Though her father's judgement is correct, we feel that he creates for Catherine a harsher and sadder life than she would have had with Townsend. If she is sheltered from disillusion, she is also sheltered from the moral experience of making a decision and living with it.

Like Caroline Spencer and Jane Rimmle, Catherine misses “living” partly because she is good; she is incapable of disobeying her father. While in *The Portrait of a Lady*, the native moral sense prevents an unqualified acceptance of “the ampler experience” of Europe, in *Washington Square* it prevents the slightest movement toward experience. Unlike the Wentworths, Catherine is restrained not only by a New England conscience, but by a clear-headed concept of loyalty. Were Catherine to disobey her father, she would certainly lose our sympathy. Nor should we think that a deficiency in intellect is the major impediment to Catherine's development; rather it is a deficiency in freedom.

In the end Catherine accepts her fate, her life-in-death. Her experience has been one solely of suffering and frustration:

From her own point of view the great facts of her career were that Morris Townsend had trifled with her affection, and that her father had broken its spring. Nothing could ever alter these facts; they were always there, like her name, her age, her plain face. Nothing could even undo the wrong or cure the pain that Morris had inflicted on her, and nothing could ever make her feel toward her father as she felt in her younger years. There

was something dead in her life, and her duty was to try and fill the void.<sup>17</sup>

Catherine can rise above self-pity, but not above suffering, the permanent scar of evil. But her suffering is almost entirely gratuitous, the effect of environment rather than free choice. Catherine acquires a kind of moral strength and stoic wisdom through her sad history, but her life is primarily one of wasted sensibilities.

There are no dark chambers of the past in James's America as there are in Hawthorne's, but the business office, the New England home, and the front parlor facing Washington Square can be, if not so sinister, equally oppressive. The bleakness of America imprisons the spirit and starves the consciousness.

<sup>17</sup>*Washington Square* (New York, 1894), p. 244.

## Book Reviews:

*Blow the Man Down: A Yankee Seaman's Adventures Under Sail*, by James H. Williams; ed. Warren F. Kuehl. 255 pp. \$4.50. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1959.

That truth is stranger than fiction is a generally accepted maxim; that it may be more exciting than fiction depends upon subject matter and reader interest. *Blow the Man Down* has the virtue of being true, often strange, and always exciting. *Blow the Man Down* is a collection of sixteen sea stories each of which is a memoir of adventure on the near and far seas by the tall-water sailor who lived them. But the stories are something more than tales of the romance of the sea. They are violent protests; they are stark tragedy; they are cruel; they cry out against man's inhumanity to man. They are the pleas for social justice that ultimately contributed much toward alleviating the hideous conditions that governed the lives of these countless Americans who, for three centuries, "went down to the sea in ships."

James H. Williams, 1864-1927, "a Negro seaman with reddish hair" whose mixed ancestry hailed from North Carolina and Massachusetts, became a blue-water sailor at the age of 12, signing on as a cabin boy on a Yankee Clipper. The practice of "signing on" at a very early age was not an uncommon one for the New England poor seeking to wrest a living from the sea and, as in Williams' case, it meant the end of formal schooling, to which he had an exposure of something less than three years.

The sixteen articles that compose the volume were written over a period of twenty-five years beginning in 1897 and were published, with one or two exceptions, in Hamilton Holt's *Independent*, a magazine of great vogue among the intelligentsia at the turn of the century. Professor Kuehl is undoubtedly correct in his conclusion that Williams' accounts of the trials and terrors of seamen on ships of American registry were a principal factor in bringing about remedial legislation by the federal government.

Lest the reader be left with the impression that this volume is solely a sociological study, let me hasten to add that it is much, much more than that. In the second story, "Thar' She Blows," we live, as we do with Richard Henry Dana, the day by day life on the whaler, the thundering excitement of stalking the prey, and the gamble with death in the whaleboat. In the "Inquisition" one cannot help recalling his

first introduction to Jack London's adventures of the sea. Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe seems to come to life again in the true experiences of Williams as a castaway for eighty-five days on one of the Crozet islets in the Indian Ocean, beautifully recorded in "Shipwreck" and in "Cast-away." Fun and frolic according to seamen's tastes of the age of Iron Men were not alien to Williams. A historic binge faithfully recorded, a brawl of gigantic proportions in Calcutta, a lifetime of jousting with no less a contestant than the seaman par excellence, Spike Riley — all of these are part of the story.

As one might expect, Williams' extreme sensitivity to the inhuman practices of shipowners and masters led him to protest by the only means available to him in the nineties. He became a labor organizer with the hope that American seamen, through organization, might effectively fight the bondage, the servitude, and the physical abuse that characterized the life of the American merchant seamen aboard so many ships of the American commercial fleet late in the last century. His career in this field was not overly successful, largely because Negroes were not particularly welcome within the primitive seamen's organizations of that day. Yet, where Williams could not reach as an organizer he did reach as a writer. And the fact that his writings were quoted at length in the halls of Congress by those who were ultimately to fashion the crucial labor and social reform legislation in the first and second decades of this century earns him the right to be called a precursor in the struggle for human rights for men of the sea.

Professor Warren F. Kuehl must be credited with a painstaking job of editing a difficult manuscript. The notes he has provided on the men and ships involved, the glossary of nautical terms, the biographical detail on Williams — all these are indispensable contributions without which the book would have been impossible.

GEORGE A. CARBONE  
*University of Mississippi*

*The Prophet Unharm'd. Trotsky: 1921-1929*, by Isaac Deutscher. 490 pp. \$9.50. London: Oxford University Press. 1959.

During my youth in Chicago, I often heard estimates and tales of Leon Trotsky from Russian and Ukrainian immigrants who, as former *Bundists*, Social Revolutionaries, and Mensheviks, were either interest-

ed in his fate as an exile or claimed to have known the man in pre-1905 Nikolayev and Odessa. These impressions varied from that of admiration of his defiance of Stalin to that of contempt for the ex-Menshevik who had "sold out" to the Bolsheviks or the Jew who had betrayed his cultural heritage. The image which emerged was that of an evil genius whose fanaticism, ruthlessness, and ambition seemed to coincide with McCutcheon's cartoon stereotype of the Bolshevik in Colonel McCormick's *Chicago Tribune*. Strangely enough, the portrait of Trotsky constructed by the disillusioned Russian Socialists in the United States gave credibility to the denigration of Trotsky which their *bete noire* and Trotsky's worst enemy, Stalin, worked so diligently to achieve. Isaac Deutscher's biography at last sweeps away the misconceptions and falsehoods which have obscured and confused the decisive role of Trotsky in conceiving and nursing the behemoth whose shadow now reaches into interstellar space.

In this second volume of a monumental three-part life of Trotsky, Deutscher carries forward his task of rescuing Trotsky from the calumny and oblivion which Stalin and his heirs have heaped on his work and memory. Yet, as in the first volume, *The Prophet Armed*, this work is neither an apology nor a panegyric. It is a painstakingly thorough and forthright narrative of Trotsky's ideas, successes, and failures to the time when, in January, 1929, he was forced into exile by the monster he had helped create. But the book is something more. As a result of his use of much new material (especially the *Trotsky Archives* at Harvard) and interpretations of "some hitherto unknown facts," Deutscher has succeeded in bringing new light to the relationship between Trotsky and Lenin and his wife, Krupskaya, during Lenin's later days; the tortuous story of Trotsky's dealings with such Old Bolsheviks as Bukharin, Zinoviev, Kamenev, Antonov-Ovseenko, Pyatakov, Rakovsky, Rykov, Preobrazhensky, and the despicable Karl Radek; the reasons for the bankruptcy and defeat of the various groups within the Party who dared to oppose Stalin and his *apparatchniks*; and the fatal weakness and collapse of the Trotskyite opposition. Indeed, were it not for the clarity and engaging style of the author the reader would be overwhelmed in a morass of facts.

Deutscher is at his best in the chapter dealing with "The Decisive Contest: 1926-27" between Stalin and Trotsky. It is, in a sense, a frightening account of how ideology was used as a blind for a vicious struggle for power within the framework of the so-called "collective leadership." Stalin emerged the victor from this struggle because Trotsky was his own worst enemy. Why? Because his vanity and overweening confidence in the strength of his popular appeal actually mortgaged his

position with an apathetic public. In short, he badly *overestimated* the confidence of the masses in his leadership and their capacity to act in his behalf, and he *underestimated* his opponent's ability to maneuver and create an ideological *raison d'être*. Then, too, Trotsky was the revolutionary who failed to make an adequate adjustment to the post-revolutionary environment. In the light of these facts it is easy to doubt Deutscher's theory that Trotsky might have triumphed over Stalin *if* he had been able to form a coalition with Zinoviev's party apparatus in Lenin-grad.

Thus, in the end, Stalin appropriated not only Trotsky's thunder but also his program. It is more than the irony of fate that Stalin put into effect the very policies which Trotsky had advocated to enable Socialism to survive in the Soviet Union, *i.e.*, a "crash program" of industrialization and the collectivization of the *muzhik*. Still, it is highly improbable that Trotsky, had he emerged the victor, would have achieved these objectives with the speed of Stalin because, although he was capable of ruthlessness, Trotsky was essentially a *bourgeois* radical with a conscience who lacked the hardness necessary to force industrialization and collectivization down the throats of the masses in record time.

The author has fulfilled the promise of the first volume and now whets the reader's appetite for more of the same in the final phase of Trotsky's life as *The Prophet Outcast*.

JOSEPH O. BAYLEN

Mississippi State University

*Teach the Freeman: the Correspondence of Rutherford B. Hayes and the Slater Fund for Negro Education, 1881-1893*, ed Louis D. Rubin, Jr. 2 vols. (lv, 236, 302 pp.) \$10.00. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959.

In the final judgement she makes of men, history may not agree always with Shakespeare's observation that "the evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones"; but with supreme irony she seems sometimes to remember them for the wrong reason. Rutherford B. Hayes might be a case in point. As the victor in the disputed election of 1876 he became a President whose best-known act was his withdrawal of the last Federal troops from the South, a step which



led to the collapse of the remaining Radical regimes and, in the disdainful view of his critics, to an abandonment of the former slaves.

Ironically, his post-presidential efforts in promoting the permanent welfare of the Negro have remained somewhat obscured. As chairman of the Slater Fund for Negro Education in the South during its first decade, he rendered a distinguished service in behalf of the ex-freedmen. His was no titular office, for he took his responsibilities seriously. And as this two-volume collection of correspondence so eloquently attests, his social thinking was far in advance of that of his own generation. He was no apostle of the shallow complacency of the Gilded Age; he may well be one of those whom history has remembered for the wrong reason.

The Slater Fund had come into existence in 1882 after John F. Slater, an industrialist of Norwich, Connecticut, had set aside one million dollars as an endowment for Negro education in the South. Determined to secure a group of distinction to direct the operations, Slater and his advisors had persuaded Hayes to head the board and men like Salmon P. Chase, Morison R. Waite, and Daniel Coit Gilman to serve on it.

In filling the critical post of general agent to direct operations in the field, the board settled finally on Atticus G. Haygood, a former Confederate chaplain, Methodist cleric, and president of Emory College in Georgia. Haygood was named to the post largely because of a courageous book, *Our Brother in Black*, which he had recently written; in it he had urged his fellow Southerners to turn their faces to the future by admitting the reality of Negro freedom and by endeavoring through education to prepare the freedmen for first-class citizenship. In his work as general agent he was no theoretician; he felt that time was too precious and money too limited to be spent in sociological studies of the Southern Negro. His duty, as he saw it, was to distribute available funds as widely as possible in aiding programs of teacher training and vocational education among Negro colleges throughout the region. Under his direction the Fund by 1890 was contributing annual grants of between \$500 and \$6000 to some thirty-six institutions.

But perhaps the major contribution of Haygood to the cause was the burning zeal he brought to it and the respect he helped to create among his fellow whites for it. In his view an even more fundamental goal than the distribution of money was the development of sympathy and support for the endeavor. "This work," he once wrote Hayes, "must take root in the South — & in Southern white consciences — Else, some day, it will die." Indicative of his furious energy was the occasion when in a span of twenty-five days he delivered twenty-seven speeches of about two hours each before an estimated total of sixty thousand persons. Until his resignation in 1891 because of financial

and other considerations, he gave unstintingly of himself to the labor.

But this collection of letters is far more than the correspondence of Haygood and Hayes. It is, in a real sense, a substantial piece of documentation of the history of the Negro in the United States, revealing the thinking of leading whites and Negroes on the challenge of education for the former slaves. Among the most interesting portions of the work is a series of letters from a young graduate student at Harvard, W. E. B. DuBois, seeking and ultimately securing assistance for two years of study abroad. By this act alone the Fund made a contribution of importance toward creating a Negro leadership.

Finally, these volumes constitute an invaluable history of the first ten years of the Slater Fund, without whose support Negro education in the South in the 1880's would doubtless have faltered even more than it did. By the time of Hayes' death in 1893 the Fund had expended about \$400,000 in helping to preserve past gains and promote future hopes. That the undertaking was as effective as it became is attributable in no small measure to the intelligence, dedication, and direction of Hayes.

Professor Louis D. Rubin, Jr., has done an expert work in selecting and editing the letters from more than twelve hundred pages of correspondence. Through his scholarly documentation and his enlightening instruction, he has done the cause of social history a substantial service.

MARTIN ABBOTT  
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*South of Appomattox*, by Nash K. Burger and John K. Bettersworth.  
376 pp. \$5.75. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1959.

If you like history, you will like this book, especially if you like it in biographical form. The ten Southerners who sat for their portraits by those proficient artists Messrs. Nash and Bettersworth came from various walks of life before and after the war, and every one of them was outstanding in military service during the Confederacy, except Jefferson Davis, who did not actually command in the field; Matthew F. Maury, whose services were diplomatic and naval; and Alexander H.

Stephens, who never in his life smelled the burn of powder.

No one should seriously object to this selection which the authors made for their purpose of showing in part through these biographies what happened in the South after Appomattox. The lives of all after Appomattox seemed to point in the same direction—reconciliation with the realities of defeat and an acceptance of their place back in the Union. Yes, even Jefferson Davis, though it came late with him. And the authors will convince any reader that it was the "Brigadiers," the military leaders, who set the pace toward reconciliation — Lee and Hampton, especially, but the others too.

All of these portraits are perceptive, incisive, and eminently learned and wise. All of them are written with wit and understanding, and a deep sentimental touch, with the possible exception of Jefferson Davis. A tear will probably fall before you have finished with Lee — how difficult it is to write of Lee without sentiment! In fact the passing of all the ten is touched with some pathos.

All of the ten are awarded titles expressive of what seemed to fit them best: Lee, "Quiet Gentleman"; Maury, "The Man Who Ran Away"; John C. Breckinridge, "Militant Moderate"; Nathan Bedford Forrest, "Man on Horseback"; Alexander H. Stephens, "The South's Conscience"; L. Q. C. Lamar, "Artificer of Reconciliation"; Joseph E. Johnson, "Subdued but Unrepentant"; Wade Hampton, "Redeeming Arm"; James Longstreet, "The Reconstructed"; and Jefferson Davis, "The Unreconstructible." The hat awarded fits some better than others, but all are becoming.

Maury's career is more out of line with the main theme of the book than any of the others; but if for no other reason than the fact that he should be rescued from oblivion at every opportunity he might well be included. The sketch of Breckinridge shows most eloquently the need of a full-length biography of this most neglected Confederate, a man who his author in agreement with others, feels would have made "a better choice for President of the Confederacy" than Jefferson Davis. **Probably the most cleverly written** of all the sketches is that of Forrest, to whom "Antecedents meant as little . . . in a sentence as they did on a family tree" and "The only thing he did not know about logistics, perhaps, was how to spell it." But all of these sketches are expertly handled in a lively and most readable style. There is no statement direct or implied as to which author wrote which sketch. It may sometimes become the pleasant task of someone to try to determine who wrote which; and it might be a more difficult one than it was to assign the *Federalist Papers* to their various authors; for apart from a varying style demanded by the character of the subject, each author was equally successful in his portraiture.

This book is not a history of Reconstruction and was not intended to be; but by recounting the lives of these ten men, mostly after the War, the authors have contributed their bit in giving a better understanding of that most unattractive part of American history called the Reconstruction. And they have rightly put the spotlight on the men who fought the war as the same ones who saved the peace: "The Brigadier had the power to make as well as break the Union. No President, no Congress, no court, no occupying army could really have brought the South back — only he. And he fulfilled his appointed mission."

E. MERTON COULTER

*University of Georgia*



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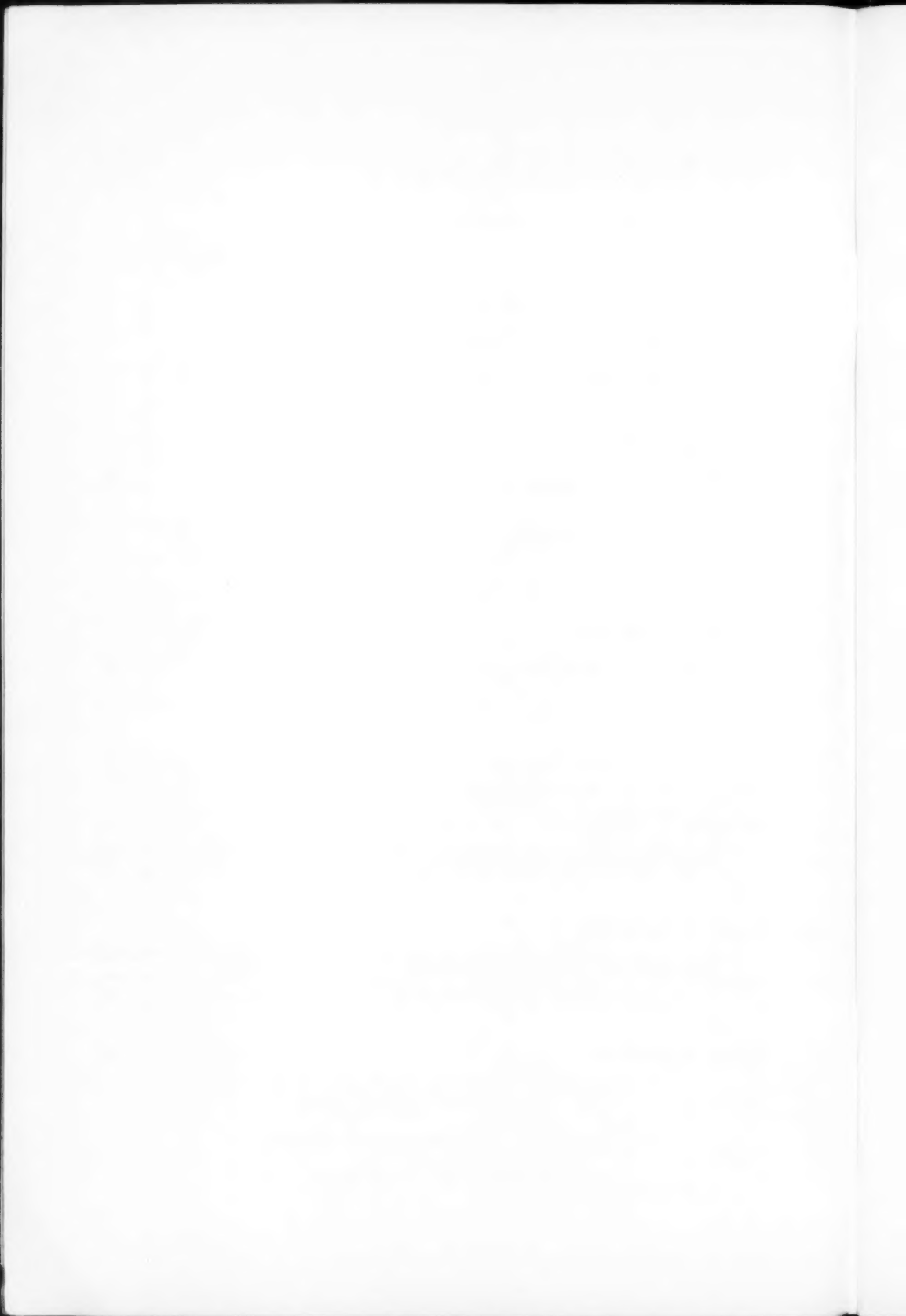
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EUGENE CURRENT - GARCIA

*Auburn University*

# The Fugitive Agrarian Movement: A Symposium Introduction

In an increasingly collectivist society, dedicated to the principles of materialism and mass production, how can the individual survive and yet hold fast to those abiding humanistic values — freedom, independence, self-respect, creative imagination, art — which make human life worthwhile? The problem is an old one in America and has engendered much thoughtful commentary from Jefferson's time to the present. If it is not, indeed, the central question in a democratic society like ours, it is one that has repeatedly challenged many of our best minds; and, especially when a group of them have grappled with it as a community of intellect, it has often been the wellspring for some of our most distinctive and durable literary expression. The Transcendental movement in 19th-century New England is a case in point; the Fugitive-Agrarian movement in 20th-century Tennessee is another.

Basic analogies between these two movements can be readily discovered wherever one turns to look. In the fascinating conversations recorded in *The Fugitives' Re-Union* (1959), for example, two such parallels are inescapable: (a) the Fugitive-Agrarians, like their Transcendental counterparts, sought *as a group* to recapture humanistic values on an individualistic basis; (b) many of the members of the group apparently derived a certain impetus from their group movement which spurred them on, individually, to achieve eminence in various professional fields, long after the original movement had dissolved. Similar implications may be seen also in the following essays, which, while offering four different points of view in their appraisal of the Fugitive-Agrarian movement, demonstrate again how important a role the members of this group have played in the unfolding drama of American cultural history.

But these papers, presented at the joint session of the South-eastern American Studies Association and the South Atlantic Modern Language Association (Atlanta, November 7, 1959), reveal a further, more significant relationship between the Fugitive-Agrarians and the cultural standard-bearers of Emerson's generation. That is, their awareness of what distinguishes permanent from merely transient values in the life of a region or a nation, and their ability to reassert those values with vigor, even in the face of majority incredulity, scorn, and opposition. It is not for nothing that two of our speakers make overt reference to Thoreau, since the parallel between *Walden* and *I'll Take My Stand* is inevitable. But even more noteworthy is the fact that all four of them offer conclusive evidence, drawn from diverse recently published sources, to show that the problems confronted by the Fugitive-Agrarians in the 1920's and 1930's are again being seriously debated by some of the same groups — the economists, sociologists, and technologists — who once accused them of being escapist neo-Confederates.

Herein may be found justification enough — if any such justification be needed — for publishing further essays dealing with the Fugitive-Agrarian movement. When Mr. Stewart points out that the Agrarians were realists who "flatly rejected the modern American gospel of Salvation through Technology"; when Mr. Hoepfner adds that the program they stood for was designed "to conserve the religious, political, and economic traditions of Jeffersonian democracy, which rest upon the liberties of the individual"; when Mr. Foster affirms that they were "correct in sensing the overwhelming power of mass culture and correct in inveighing against its corrupting influence . . . [that they] had a very valid point of view which the experience of the last thirty years has tended to enforce"; and when Mr. Nixon, one of the original Agrarians, concludes his thirty years' personal view with a whole battery of recent social criticism which "confirms our doctrine in warning man against being mechanized by his own machines to the detriment of our arts and morals" — it should be sufficiently clear that the Fugitive-Agrarian movement was no mere sectional side-show to be laughingly dismissed as a kind of Scopes trial among the intellectuals. The Fugitive-Agrarians, like the Transcendentalists before them, spoke not only for their own time and place, but for America as a whole; the doctrines they proclaimed carried profound significance for the survival and growth of our national culture and for the spiritual well-being of individual American citizens everywhere. In asserting the primacy of the good life — the life of the cultured mind and the free spirit — over that of materialist, mechanized prosperity, they sounded an alarm which has had to be re-rung in changing terms ever since the days of Plato's *Republic*. As the following essays clearly show, the Fugitive-Agrarians need make no apologies for the company they keep, nor for the contributions they have made to that community effort. The last word of praise for them will probably not be written for a long time to come.



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## The Relation Between Fugitives and Agrarians

I want to say a word about the constitution of the English Department at Vanderbilt at the time of Fugitive beginnings. In 1922-25 when the Fugitives were holding their meetings, where the members, as Warren said, "were tough on each other critically," the Department (a small one) consisted of three major professors: Edwin Mims, Walter Clyde Curry, and John Crowe Ransom. The interesting thing about this situation is that each man stood autonomously for something quite different from what either of the others stood for. Mims, a post-Victorian, was an appreciator, an inspirational oral interpreter of the literature of the Nineteenth Century, especially the poetry. He was also a progressive Southerner (consistently enough, since belief in "progress" was one of the basic tenets of the Nineteenth Century) who supported the "New South" movement, which was based upon the view that the South should get into economic and social step with the North. Curry was the new-type graduate school scholar, and a very good one. His *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences*, published in 1926, is among the half-dozen most durable scholarly works in its field. And Ransom, of course, was the poet. It is interesting, and I think unique at that time, and very much to the credit of Mims, the Department Head, that he advanced Curry and Ransom, *pari passu*, through the various grades; that is, he allowed equal "credit" for a scholarly article in PMLA, and a poem; for "The Horoscope of the Wife of Bath," and "Antique Harvesters." This was indeed a remarkable situation at a time when George Lyman Kittredge dominated practically every English department in the country. That domination, incidentally, may very well explain the absence of literary creativeness on so many college campuses. The so-called great departments simply were not interested in that sort of thing. My point is that the students at Vanderbilt were exposed *equally* to three stimuli, not just one: the stimulus of the romantic Nineteenth Century school; the stimulus of modern scholarship; and the stimulus of literary creation (and of the new criticism). The first had become a little old-

fashioned by 1925; the second was strictly *au courant*; the third was, or proved to be, the wave of the future. If this situation, with its tri-partite balance, existed in any other English department of the 1920's, I have yet to hear of it.

From what did the Fugitives flee? There are a good many answers to that question. Like their contemporaries elsewhere, of course, they reacted against the Nineteenth Century: against romanticism, progressivism, and sentimentalism. So did Eliot. But the Fugitives had at least this advantage over Eliot: of the three *isms*, the greatest irritant of all — sentimentalism — was probably more prominent in their immediate environment than in his. And that is why, I suppose, they declared at the very outset: "The Fugitives flee from nothing faster than from the high-caste Brahmins of the Old South," with whom they identified a particularly noxious kind of sentimentalism, the moonlight and magnolia of a Thomas Nelson Page. (*So Red the Rose*, by Stark Young, whom the Nashville writers greatly admire, does not belong to the literature of sentimentalism, needless to say.) Fugitive poetry was for the most part intellectual poetry; it employed wit and irony; it partook of the world literary movement to a degree that had scarcely been true of Southern writing for a century.

A question which provoked a particularly interesting discussion at the Fugitive Reunion was the connection, if any, between the Fugitive and Agrarian movements. Merrill Moore, who was not an Agrarian, insisted upon the complete separateness of the two, but the weight of opinion was heavily in support of the view that there was a connection, and an important one. The problem became, how to define the connection.

It seems that the Fugitives felt, by 1925, that they had written themselves out as poets, for the time being, or at least had utilized, to the fullest, for the time being, the benefits of close mutual criticism. And yet there was among them the feeling that there were other fields to conquer. Their poetry has been a peculiarly autochthonous product. It had presupposed, without their being conscious of the fact, Southern traditions, manners, viewpoints. It seems generally agreed that the Dayton Trial in 1925 converted them from unconscious to conscious Southerners. Louise Cowan, who is the chief scholarly authority on the Nashville writers (her monograph is not yet published,<sup>1</sup> and I quote from her article, "The Fugitive Poets in Relation to the South," in *Shenandoah*, VI [Summer, 1955], 6) says: "As in all cultural

<sup>1</sup> See Louise Cowan, *The Fugitive Group* (Baton Rouge, 1959), p. 240. (Editor's note.)

crises, the turmoil issuing from the trial brought into the foreground ideas and attitudes that had been taken for granted in the past, but were now no longer generally accepted. An event which caused many intelligent Southerners to reject their native land, propelled the Fugitive poets into a careful study of Southern history. . . . From an understanding of the deeply religious structure of life in the Tennessee hills, a structure which had its expression in Fundamentalism, grew the conviction which led these poets to their first overt defense of the South."

It was a laughable and ridiculous thing to the Northern and Western observer, no doubt, when Tennessee in the 1920's passed a law against the teaching of evolution in the public schools, but it showed at least this, which seems to me rather commendable, namely, that the Tennesseans were not going to give up their religion without a struggle. There used to be a good deal of talk about Moses *versus* Darwin, and I can remember when learned men from the University of Chicago used to come down to Nashville and give us scolding lectures on the superiority of Darwin over Moses. If I may speak for myself (I was not a member of the Fugitive-Agrarian group, but I find myself in sympathy with their attitudes), today, if absolutely forced to choose, I'm not so sure I wouldn't string along with Moses. I should hate to give up the burning bush, the gushing of the water from the rock, the dividing of the Red Sea, the thunder on Mt. Sinai, the vision of the Promised Land, and all the rest of this wonderful Myth, and it may very well be that the Pentateuch adds up to more "truth" (vague, slippery word) than the writings of Darwin, as important as they doubtless are in the history of biological science. For Myth is truer than Fact.

Actually, of course, there was, and is, no conflict between Moses and Darwin, the literal scientific truth of Darwin being on one plane, and the symbolic religious truth of Moses being on quite another, and higher, plane. But the issue was falsely presented in 1925 at Dayton, where Dayton and Tennessee and the world-at-large were told, by the Darrows as well as the Bryans, that *a choice had to be made!* An unwillingness, under such circumstances, to reject Moses seems to me quite understandable — he *was* a little better known to most of us. At least, that is the way some Southerners used to think about it. And some such attitude as this may have been in the background of the great manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand*.

Donald Davidson has said of the Southern reaction to the Dayton Trial: "It was a fierce clinging to poetic supernaturalism against the encroachments of cold logic." And Andrew Nelson Lytle has summed up the matter as follows: "The issue at the Dayton trial was between the old god and the new, the supernatural and the natural, the irreducible mystery and matter conquered and controlled by science." What the whole business seems to have amounted to is that the

Tennesseans in 1925 were not quite ready to make a Religion of Science.

*I'll Take My Stand* was not an economic blue-print, which many of its critics have mistaken it for, but a philosophy of a way of life. It recalls in some respects Thoreau's *Walden*. The South was about as far along industrially in 1930 as New England had been in 1854, the date of Thoreau's book. And if *Walden* was the chief criticism of industrial America written in the Nineteenth Century, *I'll Take My Stand* is the chief criticism of the same subject to appear in this century (the Southerners did not grapple with the problem until it arrived at their own doorstep). It is difficult to see how one can praise one book and dispraise the other, they have so much virtue in common. The fame of *Walden* was almost a century in coming (it dates from the 1930's), and oddly enough, while *Walden* was enjoying its first considerable fame, *I'll Take My Stand* was being pretty roundly damned both at home and abroad. Progressive Southerners (the "New South" men) accused the authors of wanting to turn back the clock of progress, and Northerners called the authors by such pejoratives as "aristocrats," "neo-Confederates," and the like, all of which were wide of the mark.

There are signs today of a fresh recognition of the importance of *I'll Take My Stand* (it has been recently reprinted) and I have noticed these indications particularly in New England. The book is indeed probably more read today in New England than in the South. Well, the economy of New England is, I believe, what the economists call "mature," while the South's is still in the expanding phase, which means that most Southerners are not yet in the proper frame of mind to appreciate *I'll Take My Stand*, just as most New Englanders, when New England was in its expanding phase, were not in the proper frame of mind to appreciate *Walden*. (I don't think there is a very large number of people anywhere in this country, now, capable of appreciating either *I'll Take My Stand* or *Walden*. Our belief in progress through improved machinery has become too much of a national religion, now, for that.)

Frank Owsley, the Southern historian, and one of the contributors to *I'll Take My Stand*, said at the Reunion meeting that the symposium grew out of the feeling shared by the group

that the people of America were losing the basic values of civilization, that we were going as a nation into materialism, that money value had become the real basic value, that the sense of community was disappearing, that the common courtesies of life were disappearing. . . . *I'll Take My Stand* was a revolt against something and a revolt for something. . . . It was, in a way, not just a defense; it was, it was one of Robert E. Lee's defenses — it was an offensive defense. That is, we became,

I think, in our writings very provocative. . . . The turn to the Old South was simply the seeking of an example in which as least many of the qualities that we thought were the basic qualities of civilization were embodied. We advocated an agrarian way of life as being the only example in history where civilization had developed. And also, we believed that the high-powered modern industrialism and materialism would not either develop a civilization or maintain it very long. . . . Agrarianism was a means to an end. *I'll Take My Stand* was a philosophy, not an economy.

Owsley thought the "Agrarian" tag was probably unfortunate, because, he said, "everybody thought we ought to go out and plow." Other members of the group, it transpired in the Reunion discussion, had questioned the rightness of "Agrarian." Tate had wanted, at one time, to call the movement, or philosophy, "religious humanism." Warren had suggested, at one time, the title "Tracts Against Communism." Ransom held that "the sort of economy we represented and the view of the Republic we represented was decidedly the Jeffersonian." There are interesting shades of opinion here, but clearly a broad base of agreement.

Owsley was one of the chief driving forces (Davidson, of course, was another) behind *I'll Take My Stand*, and enough has been said to show the direction which his influence took. The so-called Agrarians had no notion of reviving the Confederacy. These men were, and are, about the hardest-headed realists in modern America; they are closer to bed-rock fact than any writers I know. The attachment to them of the epithet "Fascist" by Robert Gorham Davis, and others, one must charitably pass over with Dr. Johnson's remark, "Ignorance, sheer ignorance" — ignorance (so often encountered in the North) of these men and their world.

The Agrarians — it seems we must continue to call them by that name — were, and are, interested in values, and they are making converts to those values every day. They saw, or thought they saw, these values embodied in the agrarian South, but the agrarian South was not an end but an illustration and symbol of values which they regarded as important: courtesy, neighborliness, a sense of honor, a public spirit, a sense of personal responsibility, leisure for conversation, a recognition of the need for treating people as people and not as things. Being realists, they were willing to accept and use the products of modern technology, but they did not believe — and this is the crucial point — they knew better than to believe, that people will be made better by these products, will forsooth be saved by them. They flatly rejected, in short, the modern American gospel of Salvation through Technology.

I will conclude with an interesting comment made by Ransom at the Fugitives' Reunion: "We've got now the most exquisite problems that rest on any country that's at peace. And I could wish that we had great literary men engaging in it. It might be the difference between making a civilization and just going along with a shabby culture. I wish we could now start all over."



## THEODORE C. HOEPFNER

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# Economics of Agrarianism

In discussing the Fugitive-Agrarian position, I may be guilty of presumption, for I must attempt to summarize a diversity of related views rather than a program, the men involved constituting a group chiefly in that they shared certain basic principles and worked in common for a while to advocate their views. Only four of the Fugitives — Davidson, Ransom, Tate, and Warren — contributed to the Agrarian volumes; most of the Agrarians were economists, historians, publicists, and men of affairs; and the movement was Southern primarily in that its initiators and best known members were, and in that the Southern tradition offered the best support for their hopes. There is no generally accepted name for them. To call them Fugitives is misleading, for but four of them were. To call them Agrarians is misleading, too, for they never advocated that everyone should be a farmer, or that industry should be abolished, nor were they satisfied with the term; in fact, they had thought of calling their first volume *Tracts against Communism (Fugitives' Reunion, 206-207)*.<sup>1</sup> But no specially coined term will serve, and my simplest choice seems to be to use the name by which they came to be most commonly known, rightly or wrongly, and thus I shall refer to them hereafter as the Fugitives.

Under any name, their importance makes a discussion of their position desirable; for those concerned with American freedom, and with any American culture beyond mere bread and circuses, have had to react to them, if only to react against them. They may have been

<sup>1</sup> Figures in parentheses, not otherwise identified, are page numbers. When these figures are not preceded by a title, *ibidem* is implied. That I have a number of short passages to identify makes the use of the "line-number method" spatially more economical than the standard footnote method for page references. Publication data follow for the sources principally used: *I'll Take My Stand*, by Twelve Southerners (New York: Harper & Bros., 1930); "I'll Take My Stand: A History," by Donald Davidson, in *American Review*, III (Summer 1935), 301-321; *Who Owns America?*, ed. by Herbert Agar and Allen Tate (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1936); *Fugitives' Reunion*, ed. by Rob Roy Purdy (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1959). Sources used but not quoted, and those sufficiently noted in the text, are omitted here.

voices crying in the wilderness — they have been so accused — but their opponents had to cry them down or listen to them; and that they were cried down is not against them, for it seems to me more honorable to lose in a good cause than to win in any other sort, and I take it that a cause is never lost until the last battle has been fought.

I shall endeavor, first, to summarize what the Fugitives believed; second, with some inescapable overlapping, to show why they opposed our impersonal, absentee-ownership industrialism, favoring instead an economy of personally owned and operated farms and small businesses; and third, though all too briefly, to indicate that their ideas were eminently practicable at the time, by citing the implementation of an independent but similar and contemporary idea which resulted in the "Plant to Prosper Program," sponsored by the *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, and to suggest that the Fugitives' cause failed not because of any unsoundness in their view but because of a confusion of patriotic emotion and economic boot-strap lifting during the War, and in spite of the fact that employment in April 1940 (9,756,761 according to the U. S. Census) was larger than it had been at the end of 1933 (approximately 9,000,000 according to the estimate of the U. S. Bureau of Statistics), remembering that Roosevelt took office in March 1933. The War, not the Welfare, ended the depression.

## II

Properly speaking, the Fugitives did not graduate into Agrarians: only four of them did; but these were the significant poets among them; they served as a sort of magnetic center for both movements; they contributed to both *I'll Take My Stand* and *Who Owns America?*; and they are the men most generally associated with both the poetry and the economics in the public mind. They and their compeers thought of themselves as Jeffersonian democrats and believed that the agrarian tradition, still strongest in the South, best represented the ideas they held in common and their revolt against absentee-landlord monopoly in industry and society, whether this monopoly take the form of plutocracy (in which economic power is concentrated in the hands of a wealthy few, with a centralized government subservient to those few), or of some form of Marxian Socialism (in which both economic and governmental powers are concentrated in the hands of a bureaucracy backed by the coercive force of the State).<sup>2</sup> They did not advocate a destruction

<sup>2</sup> This was true at the time. Later, Mr. Ransom changed his view, becoming what may be termed a Keynesian Socialist, and one assumption seems to be that the original position was naive, since the "originator" and "leader" rejected it. (The terms have been used.) Mr. Ransom was always influential, but the history of the Fugitives does not disclose him or any other one person as founder or leader. The Fugitives were not a football team, complete with coach and captain.

of industry as such, nor a wholesale back-to-the-farm migration; what they wanted was a revolution against monopoly under whatever disguise; but the spearhead of their attack was upon monopolistic industry because it was at that time the present danger; for it dominated our modes of thinking and acting; it was increasingly dehumanizing us even in our non-industrial relations; and its unchecked progression would lead us into Communism in fact, regardless of the label it might assume, whereas the agrarian society would be one in accordance with the true order of God, nature, and man, and would provide fuller opportunity for the play of man's proper humanity. The essential qualities of that society — order, tradition, and stability — are merely aspects of that humanity, and depend upon a traditional religion, a factor that should be emphasized.

For this kind of society, men's political and economic independence and the preservation of their local rights are, of course, essential. These cannot be maintained under monopoly control, whether plutocratic or Marxist. The Fugitives were radicals, seeking the root of our problems; but they were radical conservatives, for they wished to conserve the religious, political, and economic traditions of Jeffersonian democracy, which rest upon the liberties of the individual. Furthermore, they believed that political independence must rest upon economic independence, which is possible only when men have an effective control of their means of making their livings, a control that must be personal if it is to be real.

The heart of the Fugitive position — for it was not a program, though some of its advocates used that term — can be simply stated: "The basis of liberty is independence," but this definition needs expansion, and a quotation from James Muir Waller's "America and Foreign Trade" (*Who Owns America?*, 160) may serve: "We cannot maintain a capitalistic-democratic system without a very considerable decentralized production under owner-operation. Since the small business man and the farmer . . . are the two chief types who can own property which they themselves operate, there are strong moral and political reasons favoring this program in addition to the economic reasons. . . ." Some excerpts from Donald Davidson's "I'll Take My Stand: A History" (*American Review*, Summer 1935) should serve us further: "I'll Take My Stand was intended to be a book of principles and ideas . . . rather than a detailed program. It was based upon historical analysis and contemporary observation. It was not a handbook of farming or economics. It was not a rhapsody on Pickett's charge and the Old Plantation. It was first of all a book for mature Southerners. . ." (303-304). "But we have never been in the false and uncritical position attributed to us by some interpreters, of invariably preferring Southern things merely because they are Southern. . . . We wanted a life which through its own conditions and purposefulness would engender naturally

(rather than by artificial stimulation), order, leisure, character, stability, and that would also, in the larger sense, be aesthetically enjoyable. . . . [and] all this drove us straight to the South and its traditions. . . . We believe that life determines economics, or ought to do so, and that economics is no more than an instrument, around the use of which should gather many more motives than economic ones. The evil of industrial economics was that it squeezed all human motives into one narrow channel and then looked for humanitarian means to repair the injury. . . . To us [an agrarian society] presupposed several kinds of farmers and endless varieties of other occupations. The elements of such a society had always existed in the South. They must now be used and improved if people were to remain their own masters and avoid the consequences of an industrial order which we could already see was headed toward communism or fascism" (309-311). "The large-scale plantation had been an important part of the older Southern life, but we were rather critical of the plantation. . . . We wished that the greatest number of people might enjoy the integrity and independence that would come with living upon their own land" (311-312). In his concluding section, he adds: "[We] favor a definite policy of land conservation, land distribution, land ownership. . . [and] legislation that will deprive the giant corporation of its privilege of irresponsibility. . . . We hold very strongly for a revision of our political framework that will permit regional governments to function adequately. . . . That is to say, we favor a true Federalism and oppose Leviathanism, as ruinous to the South and eventually to the nation. . . . The so-called Agrarians are not a neatly organized band of conspirators. They are individuals united in a common concern but differing among themselves as to ways and means . . . Undoubtedly the South is a part of modern economy. Who could deny that? We should nevertheless insist that the South still has liberty to determine what its role will be with relation to that economy; and that that liberty ought not to be abrogated by the South or usurped by others . . ." (319-321). What Mr. Davidson, writing in 1935, said directly of the South, was extended to the nation as a whole in *Who Owns America?*, published the following year, and I quote the beginning of Herbert Agar's "Introduction" to that book: "When the social and economic system is on the rocks, those who try to build a better world should make a picture, in human terms, of what they want that world to be. This picture is more important than any Reform Bill. If a reformation is to endure, it must be based on sound political and economic theory; but if a reformation is even to begin, it must be based on an ideal that can stir the human heart."

### III

As to their reasons for opposing industrial monopoly, these may be indicated briefly. From John Crowe Ransom's "Introduction"

to *I'll Take My Stand*, to which all the contributors subscribed, it is clear that they did not oppose science or industry as such, but only the industrial plutocracy resulting from our obsession with them, and the notion that making a living is life's only important aim. As Mr. Ransom phrases it: "The contribution that science can make to a labor is to render it easier by the help of a tool or process, and to assure the laborer of his perfect economic security while he is engaged upon it. Then it can be performed with leisure and enjoyment. But the modern laborer has not exactly received this benefit under the industrial regime. His labor is hard, its tempo is fierce, and his employment is insecure. The first principle of a good labor is that it must be effective, but the second principle is that it must be enjoyed. Labor is one of the largest items in the human career; it is a modest demand to ask that it may partake of happiness" (xii). (Otherwise, one might add, science has given us complication, but not progress.) He points out, writing in 1930, that such evils as over-production, unemployment, and a growing inequality of wealth cannot be cured by bigger and better machines and more of them, for this kind of remedy simply enlarges the disease. Furthermore, such presumed cures as the militancy of labor, planning by super-engineers, or the establishment of "an economic super-organization which in turn would become the government" must lead us into Communism, regardless of the label we may use (xiv). (In this connection, it may be interesting to note that Alex Inkeles and Raymond Bauer, in *The Soviet Citizen*, published by Harvard University Press, Fall 1959, have reached the same conclusion from the other end of the road with an apparently opposite response. Interesting, too, is a book by a lecturer on sociology at Columbia University, *Work and Its Discontents*, by Daniel Bell, 1956, which is concerned primarily with the deleterious psychological effects of the mass industries on the workers. I mention these books because the Fugitives have been accused of an unrealistic nostalgia, a charge that I have not heard brought against the sociologists.)

Additionally, Mr. Ransom points out that neither religion nor the arts have a proper life under such an industrialism, which tends to pervade the whole pattern of our lives, and that "The amenities of life also suffer under the curse of a strictly-business or industrial civilization . . . (i.e.) manners, conversation, hospitality, sympathy, family life (etc.)," and that though "we have more time in which to consume, and many more products to be consumed . . . the tempo of our labors communicates itself to our satisfactions, and these also become brutal and hurried" (xiv-xv). (Incidentally, even our statistics now support their view, for despite our marvelous comforts and conveniences, our chain-stores and social planners — all delightful in themselves — we have the highest suicide, divorce, and crime rates in our history; fully half of our hospital beds are reportedly occupied by mental cases;



stomach ulcers and heart failures are familiar; our discontents are obvious; our entertainments are increasingly mere distractions; our novels and plays seem obsessed with violence, raw sex, and worse, perhaps appropriate to the great cities where the best sellers are determined; and only the benevolence of the press mitigates our awareness of the crime and corruption in those cities. To accuse the Fugitives of having been unrealistic seems ironic.)

They were all the more disturbed because, by 1933, forty-nine percent of all corporate wealth was controlled by only 200 corporations, and this corporate wealth constituted 78% of our total national wealth. Such a condition is dangerous, of course. The percentages (from *The Modern Corporation and Private Property*, by Adolf A. Berle and Gardiner C. Means, New York, 1933) are quoted by Allen Tate in his "Notes on Liberty and Property," in *Who Owns America?* Mr. Tate reminds us that only "to the extent to which a man or a social group controls the property by which its welfare is insured is the man or group possessed of liberty" (80). "The drift of my argument," Mr. Tate continues, "is that there is a point at which effective ownership ceases, although the legal fictions" may flourish beyond that point. "So, a defender of . . . private property will question not only the collectivist State, but also large corporate property" (80-81). "A true property system will be composed of a large proportion of owners whose property is not to be expressed solely in terms of exchange-value, but retains . . . the possibility of use value . . . [but] the social aspect of responsibility cannot exist [for the corporation, which] must produce for the market; [with] labor . . . necessarily an inhuman item of cost . . . . The stockholder has no chance to be responsible, neither has the chairman of the board. Both are involved in a system of property rights in which responsibility to labor is on principle irrelevant" (83-85). "Liberty in the true sense is grossly caricatured when it is replaced by the mere possibility of power over our fellow men" (93). He is careful to add also: "We do not ask everybody to live on a farm, nor . . . [to] buy a small store [or] factory . . . but [that our society should be one in which] the majority of men own small units of production, whether factories or farms" (92). Incidentally, in any discussion of the fugitives' view of corporate industrialism, one should bear in mind that both *I'll Take My Stand* and *Who Owns America?* were published during the great depression, which lasted from the end of 1929 to about the beginning of 1941; and that the behavior of the industrial leaders was an irresponsible one, no effective unemployment insurance for the workers having been established, or apparently even contemplated. A system that encourages idleness at public expense is one that plays with economic fire, but a system that condemns workers to sell apples at street corners, as an alternative to starvation, is one that men are forced to challenge and, if possible, to change.



The Fugitives oppose large-scale industrialism on another ground as well: the savings of costs by mass-production are largely offset by other costs (transportation of raw materials and finished products, advertising, supervisory expenditures, storage and insurance, etc.). Small businesses could compete in economics, but not in politics or publicity.<sup>3</sup> Quality, too, is affected—generally adversely—under mass-production, because goods must be rapidly replaceable in order to keep the production going in mass. (See T. J. Cauley, "The Illusion of the Leisure State," *Who Owns America?*, 283 ff., but the subject has been often treated.)

## IV

As to the "Plant to Prosper Program," sponsored by the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* from the end of 1933 to apparently sometime early in the War, I must be brief, but the point of the comparison is that for about eight years or more a competition was organized and prizes offered to encourage farmers, both owners and tenants, to diversify their production, to raise more of what they used, and to improve their homes, the scoring being 40% for living at home and utilizing everything possible that the particular farm had to offer; 20% for diversification; 20% for home improvement and home management; the remaining 20% for other factors. The enrollment in the program increased each year, the incomplete figure for 1940 being 35,000 farm families. I do not have a breakdown for Tennessee and Mississippi, but for Arkansas in 1940 there were approximately 10,000 white families and 7,000 Negro families. (These figures are from the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* for May 5, 1940.) I have time for only one example and I take it from G. M. O'Donnell's "Looking down the Cotton Row," in *Who Owns America?* (175-176), rather than from the "Plant to Prosper Program" record. George Smith and his wife moved to a run-down farm with a two-and-a-half-room house, without lights or running water, or fencing to speak of, and with but one barn. They lost money in 1932, their first year, because they raised cotton and corn only, but they added two rooms to the house with some traded lumber; they traded two pigs for an electric system and wired the house, the shops that Mr. Smith had built, and the barn. Through additional trading, they acquired a pressure tank and the piping for running water. By 1935 they had completed a model home, with electricity and running water, telephone and radio, stained pine floors, modern furniture (self-made), a new storage house, a garage for their truck, a well-

3 During my years in business, I worked for a time with a comparatively small manufacturing company that on a major item undersold its giant competitors by 5 percent without sacrificing quality, service, or profit.

house, a work shop, a scalding vat, etc., all either made on the farm or bought with the profits from its cows, hogs, chickens, and crops. In three years, Mr. Smith, who started with nothing but his run-down land, was happy, prosperous, and independent. The Smith case may not have been typical, but it was not unique.

What could have happened to such a program, and to some others equivalent to it? The answer, I suspect, is that philosophy that must appeal to liberty and responsibility and labor cannot compete with governmental largess, especially when the tax-supported bounty is accompanied by a full exploitation of our chiliastic emotions. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Fugitive-Agrarian went undeeded, for in such circumstances men follow the primrose path with a clear conscience. Angels might behave differently, or even men under wise political leadership. Under misinformed or demagogic leadership — *apres nous le deluge!*

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## Flight From Mass Culture

The small group of talented students and teachers who foregathered at Vanderbilt in the early 1920's and started a literary magazine began far more than they realized then and perhaps more than they realize even now. They named their magazine *The Fugitive*, and started a giant and often choleric guessing game about the reason for the name. If they were "fugitives," what were they fleeing from? For some reason this question became even more acerbic after four of the original Fugitives had sparked a new movement and acquired a new name, The Agrarians.

There were answers — the Fugitives themselves said they fled nothing more vehemently than the Brahmins of the old South. Their northern critics accused them of fleeing reality, of burying their heads, ostrichlike, in the sand. They were ridiculed as neo-Confederates, as illusionists, as romantic feudalists, as escapists from the healthy realities of modern life. One thing that went almost unnoticed in the general furor was that the Fugitives and Agrarians were in full flight from mass culture. They were fleeing it in the 1920's as Fugitives, in the 1930's as Agrarians, and if we are to judge from their recent reunion at Vanderbilt University in 1956, they are, with one important exception, still in flight from it.

I believe that it is only a matter of justice today to affirm that the Fugitive-Agrarians were correct in sensing the overwhelming power of mass culture and correct in inveighing against its corrupting influence on art, culture, and life in general. I believe that far from being wrong-headed and escapist illusionaries, the Fugitive-Agrarians had a very valid point of view which the experience of the last thirty years has tended to enforce. To make this point clearer let me set up a description of mass culture in the arts. This brief summation is a digest of a recent book, *Mass Culture, Popular Arts in America*, a symposium edited by Rosenberg and White, which in some 650-odd pages analyzes the complex facets of mass culture today. This is the picture which emerges. I give here only the conclusions which the authors reach.

In English culture before the industrial revolution, art appears in two modes — the mode of high art and the mode of folk art. High art is individual, self-conscious art by a known artist possessed of genius to a high degree — a Chaucer, a Milton, a Shakespeare. Folk art arises unselfconsciously from the folk who possess a high sense of community, plus a high sense of individuality. The interaction of these two kinds of art produces a healthy condition in a culture, holding it in a kind of living tension, separating the elite from the folk without breeding rivalry or hatred. The industrial revolution and modern technology upset this balance and generated a third type of art, mass art, designed to palliate the boredom of the masses and condition them to accept the dubious blessings of mass culture.

This mass culture is an homogenized product, reducing its appeal to the lowest common denominator of the masses, then mixing this with a kind of slickness, as in *Life Magazine*, to allure the great middle class audience. Since bad art drives out good (because it makes a more immediate sense appeal to the greatest number of people) it eventually debases the taste of the masses who erect their own debased standard of taste to the position of the controlling norm. This is Gasset's theme in *Revolt of The Masses*. Gradually this mass art reduces the audiences of high art and of folk art and threatens the destruction of both. Its effect is to brutalize the senses, to bore and depersonalize its audience, to contribute to a decline in ethics. Mass media, the great agency of mass art, alienate people from personal experience and intensify their moral isolation. All popular art leaves its audience unsatisfied (we asked for truth and beauty and Mr. Luce gave us *Life Magazine*). So most mass men today, counselled by mass media, consoled by bureaucratic voices, amused in their leisure by photography, pornography, and Mickey Spillane, still lead lives of quiet desperation. The percentage of such men in our society has risen sharply since Thoreau's classic indictment.

The attack on mass culture by Rosenberg and White in their book summarized above is a severe one; it is clear that the grave deficiencies of mass culture now concern a great many people who were awakened from their dogmatic belief in inevitable progress by their first perusal of George Orwell's terrifying 1984 (even the title of this glimpse into the future of our increasingly abstract society is a number, an abstraction). This paper is an attempt to show the nature and breadth of the attack the Fugitive-Agrarians made upon the worst phases of mass culture.

Consider first the genesis of the Fugitive movement. We have a great deal of light on this genesis through the retrospective comments made at the recent Fugitive reunion (1956). The important point made there was that there was a strong sense of community and even of fami-

lial relationship in the Fugitive movement which insured a healthy traditionalism and a healthy artistic situation, the very atmosphere which a mass culture cannot ever provide. William Yandell Elliot spoke to this point.

"Now I think undoubtedly there is something in the South and there is particularly something in the fact that many of us were kin to each other several generations back. I believe I am a distant kinsman of both Johnny (Ransom) and Andrew (Lytle). And we have a sense of community that goes far deeper than probably most people have in that kind of sense — the people who grew up as boys together, like the Starrs grew up with me . . . . But there was a continuation of a certain robustness, a fundamental traditionalism which cemented us, and a complete independence for . . . no programming. A complete resistance of anybody programming anything."<sup>1</sup>

All the Fugitives agreed to the above comments. They went on to make the further points that Nashville at that time was a small city where everybody knew everybody else, where there was a tradition of talk and where the relations between city and university were informal and reasonably tolerant. The University itself constituted a community where there were a few first rate minds on the faculty to which the students had easy access. The students thus came to know profoundly and well, through formal instruction and through social intercourse, these fine minds. There was a sense of community of university and of small city which seemed unique to the Fugitives as they discussed this in the perspective of thirty years. These men had since studied or taught at many diverse schools — at Oxford, the Sorbonne, Yale, Harvard, Stanford, Princeton, Minnesota, etc. They taught seminars, conducted poetry conferences, advised amateur groups; never, however did they find anywhere else this sense of community, of unforced tradition, of gentility, and of courtliness which they had shared in the Fugitive movement of Vanderbilt. Their very communal origin, their uncompelled and unforced cohesion gave their entire movement from its inception a direction and tone that was anti-collectivist, anti-mass culture.

Their specific attack on mass culture begins with the statement in the prologue to *I'll Take My Stand* that "Industrialism is the economic organization of the Collective American Society," and that, "this industrialism has a dehumanizing and corrupting influence when it completely dominates society." All the twelve contributors to this volume agree that giant industrialism is the villain of the piece; Ransom observing that "Industrialism is a program under which men, using the latest scientific paraphernalia, sacrifice comfort, leisure and the enjoy-

1 Purdy, *Fugitives' Reunion*, pp. 90-1.

ment of life to win Pyrrhic victories from nature at points of no strategic importance." They are especially concerned with the effect of this industrialism on art, making the point that art suffers; that "neither the creation nor the understanding of works of art is possible in an industrial age." Davidson in his essay, "A Mirror for Artists," elaborates this theme at great length. He argues that the complete ascendancy of industrialism will mean that there are no arts left to foster. In the industrial society arts are luxuries to be bought and placed in a museum which isolates them from normal living. In an agrarian society the arts belong as a matter of course in the routine of daily life and are so employed by the folk. Industrialism's mass production and distribution has meant primarily the distribution of bad art (*kitch*) for profit, thus debasing the taste of the masses. Davidson's conclusion is that the artist's chief hope today is to cease to be the pure artist withdrawn comfortably from the practical world. He must enter as a person into the struggle to repudiate industrialism's supremacy in society and to retain some of the virtues of a provincial, conservative, and agrarian society.

The Fugitive-Agrarians noted also the debasement of language, the medium of literature, by our mass culture. The advent of printing has not been an unmixed blessing since mass communication has been one of the chief agencies in the formation of the mass mind. Tate spoke up to say, "We've got constant pressure from all sorts of directions in this, in this high-powered commercial, technological situation which corrupts the language. Every word that appears in the newspaper or over the radio is debased . . . T. S. Eliot translates the phrase from Mallarme 'to purify the language of the tribe! That's what every modern poet has got to do, because in the pre-nineteenth-century cultures there wasn't so wide a gap between common speech—the so called man in the street, or Wordsworth's ideal peasant — and the educational man . . . It's simply that the words in common usage in the ordinary human affairs, day after day are debased by sociology, commercialism, and what not."<sup>2</sup> Tate goes on to say that for the poet today, "It's a choice between literary poetry or none at all; the canned poetry manufactured for a super-bourgeois society."<sup>3</sup>

The depersonalizing, abstract effect of mass culture became one of the primary terms of the Fugitive-Agrarian attack. All of them speak strongly on this. Tate led off by his general remark that "Only a return to the provinces, to the small self-contained centers of life, will put the all-destroying abstraction America to rest."<sup>4</sup> Ransom continued

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>4</sup> Hart, *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, p. 6.



this theme by observing, "It is into precisely these intangibles i.e., a pile of money, a volume of produce, a market or a credit system that industrialism would translate the farmer's farm. It means the *dehumanization* [my italics] of his life."<sup>5</sup>

Owsley remarked that the Agrarians held "... a belief that the high powered modern industrialization and materialism would not either develop or maintain a civilization long . . . . The Fugitives revolted against . . . stereotyped forms of living and thinking."<sup>6</sup>

Warren made the most complete statement on this subject. "Before we got in the last war, there was the period of unmasking blank power everywhere. And you felt that all of your work was irrelevant to this unmasking blank power everywhere. And you felt that all of your work was irrelevant to this unmasking of this brute force in the world — that the dehumanizing forces had won. . . . There are two questions: one, the sense of the disintegration of the notion of the individual in that society we're living in . . . and the relation of that to Democracy. It's the machine of power in this so-called democratic state; the machines disintegrate individuals, so you have no individual sense of responsibility and no awareness that the individual has a past and a place . . . . But for me it [the Agrarian movement] was a protest . . . against certain things; against a kind of dehumanizing and disintegrative effect on your notion of what an individual person could be in the sense of a loss of your role in society . . . in the power state[the individual] lost existence, disappeared, was a cipher. We were trying to find a notion of democracy which would make it possible for people to be people and not be bosses or exploiters . . . but to have a community of people rather than a community of something else."<sup>7</sup>

It seems clear enough from the foregoing evidence that the Fugitive-Agrarians did mount a massive attack on mass culture and its degrading and enslaving attributes. A vast amount of documentation could be adduced to add to the above statements. To assess the value of that attack is far more difficult. I suppose no exact assessment can ever be made. There are certain puzzling factors in the Fugitive-Agrarian history which should be brought up here before a conclusion is drawn for this paper. Let me state them quickly.

One of the most obvious anomalies of the movement was that of the four key figures who were the heart of the Fugitive-Agrarian

5 *I'll Take My Stand*, p. 20

6 *Fugitives' Reunion*, pp. 205-6.

7 *Ibid.*, pp. 208-14 *passim*.

movement, three — Ransom, Tate, and Warren — moved north, “fled” as their unfriendly critics said to the very culture they had been anathematizing. The South seemed to offer little encouragement or sustenance to them. The best academic appointments seemed to lie in the very region which they had condemned, and the North received them and absorbed them without any particular rancor or outcry. Only Davidson resisted the appeal of greener academic pastures and remained at Vanderbilt defending vigorously the principles which some of his confreres seemed to have dropped or yielded. Davidson has always seemed the staunchest and most committed of the group in his devotion to the “Southern” way, and even today he does not seem to have yielded the positions he took up in the 1920’s and 30’s.

William Elliot, who was a Fugitive but not an Agrarian, went north to Harvard where he made a fine reputation as a political scientist and where he continued to fight the mass mind, as he testified at the Fugitive’s Reunion. “I am trying to get a ‘Roundtable of the Republic’ to make some head against this mass attitude — to select the best in our society, to get an elite for a model once more back into being — which, it seems to be, is the point towards which Fugitives would naturally head as a problem.”<sup>8</sup> This clearcut statement seems completely in consonance with the Fugitive-Agrarian opposition to mass culture. Note then, the surprising position taken by Ransom in the same discussion. “But my feeling is that we are faced with a new culture in this country, that the strings that bound us to Europe are all gone. Anybody who teaches English knows that the Department of English goes down steadily and proportionately in the appeal which it makes to students. I introduced into my house . . . a television set last summer. I use it to go slumming. And I must confess that I think it’s very healthy that we are starting all over here in this country with a kind of culture which is based on *mass consumption* [my italics].”<sup>9</sup>

This is a strange statement indeed for one frequently spoken of as the ideological leader of the Fugitive-Agrarians. By this statement he seems to withdraw all that his leadership has stood for. Yet, it is a key statement and explains, I think, many of the ambiguities of the Fugitive-Agrarian movement which have puzzled outsiders. Ransom’s basic intellectual stance is that of *Vaihinger*, the philosopher of “as if.” Ransom makes this clear in his *God Without Thunder* when he justifies orthodox religion as a useful myth, one which does not have ontological validity but serves a useful psychological function. You should accede

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192-3.

to it not because it's true in an absolute sense but because it organizes your social and aesthetic and ethical life in an orderly and helpful fashion. This is analogous to the Arnoldian strategy and is ultimately, it seems to me, a defeating and sterile concept.

This complete defection of Ransom — the lost leader of the Agrarians — is one of the strangest phenomena to emerge from the recent history of the movement. Why he chose to do this I do not know; I doubt if his closest associates know. In the light of what we know now it seems clear that his departure north to Kenyon College around 1938 was symbolic of his inner change. He left Vanderbilt, he left the South and by 1943 in an article in the *Kenyon Review* he repudiated Agrarianism itself as a rather naive fantasy. By 1954, also in the *Kenyon Review*, he is renouncing the religious humanism of the Agrarians for the secular humanism of Wallace Stevens, and by 1956 he is joyfully embracing a new culture based on mass consumption. This, I repeat, is the strangest phenomenon in the entire movement. Davidson, of course, and Tate and Warren have steadfastly resisted all the allurements of mass culture.

In conclusion, then, what can we say of the future? We can say that the odds are heavily on the side of the gray and faceless man-swarm — the lonely crowd. Each day the tide of lowest common denominator culture rises higher and higher about the little islands of traditional culture — the Fugitive-Agrarians are such an island. But one day the tide will cover them. It won't be an apocalyptic day; our culture islands will not end with a bang. Like Winston Smith in the conclusion of Orwell's novel 1984, we will still be alive, if you can call such an existence living — we too will see the face of *Big Brother* and suddenly we'll feel a warm glow and know that we no longer hate him — we love *Big Brother*. If this is the world of the future, it is a world that the Fugitive-Agrarians never made.

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## A Thirty Years' Personal View

This paper frankly is highly selective. It has to be, for the Fugitives and Agrarians have, separately and in combination, traced and tramped so many main roads and by-roads of thought and doctrine that no surveyor can get over all of them. Certain of the side-roads are outside of my knowledge and preference. I speak humbly as one who was not a Fugitive and boastingly as one who was, and is, an Agrarian (both upper and lower case), according to my own individualistic interpretation. I joined the Agrarian prophets as a recruit after the Fugitive poets had prepared the way with their psalms of human values. I look upon *I'll Take My Stand* as an exposition and a vindication in prose of a genuinely poetic way of life, with due credit and allowance for any uses of poetic license of thought affecting the prose product.

I was recruited for *I'll Take My Stand* during a faculty tenure at Tulane University, where I taught in a two-professor course in history and literature. I had already served three years at Vanderbilt, where I wrote reviews for Donald Davidson's book page of the Nashville *Tennessean*. I had come to Vanderbilt in 1925 from Iowa State College, where I had written a dissertation on the *Populist Movement in Iowa* under Professor William E. Dodd (University of Chicago), a good Southern agrarian. I took a salary reduction in shifting from a vocational center of applied learning to an avocational center of liberal arts. For regional and humanistic reasons I thus became a sort of fugitive to the Fugitives. Incidentally, I was removing from a state where a cynic had noted an exceedingly greater economic interest in manure than in literature to a state where, according to another cynic, there was a biolegal question as to whether the monkey was his keeper's brother. As I was coming the Scopes hopes were ending, Clarence Darrow was leaving, and Edwin Mims was *Advancing South*. In a few weeks I seemed to be back at scientific Ames, Iowa, when Chancellor Kirkland observed on Vanderbilt's semi-centennial occasion, with officers

of national Foundations in the audience, that the proper answer to the recent episode at Dayton was more laboratories on the Vanderbilt campus. On the eve of my transferring to New Orleans I absorbed an offset to the Mim-Kirkland-Ames slant from reading John Crowe Ransom's paper in *The Sewanee Review*<sup>1</sup> linking the traditional South with Western Europe in terms of emphasis on the higher, nonmaterial aspects of civilization. This revived my gleanings from reading the comments of European travellers in the Old South in Old South days.

All my New Orleans-Nashville correspondence concerning my assignment for *I'll Take My Stand* was with Donald Davidson. The intra-group records of comments indicate that I was considered a satisfactory choice for handling Southern economic life, if I could be given "a little coaching." In heart and mind I was as much farmer as teacher while writing this chapter, "Whither Southern Economy?" and exchanging letters with Donald Davidson on the subject. I was pretty close to the soil as the oldest heir to a Nixon estate and chairman of policy-making in depression years for a Northeast Alabama farm tract occupied by a number of heirs, including minors, and a group of tenant families. I had in this work a rich experience in economic and human relations.

The Nixon agrarians were out of debt, as to their estate, could not go in debt, could not liquidate without serious losses and could not show much net operating profits. But we could and did live and let live as circumstantial fugitives from a too acquisitive society. We were closer to traditional ways than to any proletarian or profiteering culture. I could not practice the alleged Protestant capitalistic hypocrisy of praying on my knees on Sunday and preying on my neighbors on Monday. There and then I vitally experienced the shaping and tempering of an agrarian philosophy. This inner philosophy found its way into *I'll Take My Stand*, and it has motivated my retention of my divisional share of ancestral acres, including the home site of a great-grandfather. I may be soon returning to native ground; in lieu of retiring I shall undertake a retreading of life and learning in a natural organic manner.

My agrarian philosophy is the true philosophy of *I'll Take My Stand*, as inspired by the Fugitive movement, with strippings of several digressive notions and wayward strolls, including a few of my own, which I undertake not to reconcile. This philosophy does not reject industrial and urban processes as secondary and supplementary to ways of life and to humanistic values. But it rejects materialistic industrialism and materialistic urbanism, whether of capitalistic or communistic

1 "South — Old or New," *Sewanee Review*, XXXVI (April, 1928), 138-47.

vintage. It disavows any worship of such isms. This central theme of our symposium has too often been overlooked and distorted by our critics, our champions, and sometimes even by ourselves. We have been described or branded as tinkers seeking to turn the clock backward, although, in fact, we have rather sought to moderate it to an orderly pace and prevent it from running wild like a fire alarm. As Nature's children we have endeavored to cultivate a healthy respect for common parents, both Father Time and Mother Earth, with reverence for the teachings of History and the blessings of Nature.

Our stray points have been attacked as main points. I might cite the example of a Southern University professor of economics who assured me in conversation that *I'll Take My Stand* was false on all economic counts. Checking with him brought out the fact that he had not read my contribution, the one and only chapter in the book directly concerned with the Southern region's economy. He was erecting his own straw man for a convenient target, omitting all the implications of religious humanism, which Allen Tate had wished to emphasize in the title as preferable to the one we used. One of the antagonists who used economic points in debating our theme with John Crowe Ransom admitted privately that it was wise to skip this chapter on economics.

I venture to suggest that, in the short view, the debates between Ransom and opponents in different Southern cities served to confuse the central meaning of our work. I speak as a sponsor of the debate in New Orleans, where a serious observer remarked that the symposium was being superficially attacked as a way or work, not fundamentally as offering a way of life. There was more flanking than head-on movement, it seemed to me. Flanking action may win battles, dramatize events, and focus attention on brilliant leadership. But such action does not necessarily test or measure the total power or central position of armies or ideas, any more than the continental edge of Hollywood provides a true index of American society.

The interesting debates as well as the numerous partisan words in the press, which greeted the publication of *I'll Take My Stand*, served more to give life than to lend clarification to the work's main theme. But life counts, and, in this case, it continued a call for clarification. Otherwise we might not be concerned with this subject as we are today. Sundry subsequent words and ways of my Agrarian colleagues meet with my disapproval. But, in the name of agrarian Jefferson and in the spirit of John Stuart Mill, I salute these colleagues for keeping the philosophical pot boiling for these many years, for providing warm material for studies and dissertations in the North and South.



The Agrarians in sounding alarms on the trends of the fabulous 'twenties anticipated or foreshadowed significant alarmists of the troublous 'fifties, not to mention intervening prophets. One might trace parallels of social criticism between *I'll Take My Stand* and such works as David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, Robert Nisbet's *The Quest for Community*, and W. H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*. Donald Davidson's indictment of giant standardized economic bureaucracy could provide a thematic motto for Wilhelm Ropke's *The Social Crisis of Our Time*. In *The Communist Challenge to American Business*, Clarence Randall is saying in 1959 what Clarence Nixon wrote in 1929 in urging his fellow businessmen to bear in mind that economic trade and production should be serviceably subordinate to the good life. Walter Lipmann's expression in *The Public Philosophy* (1955) of serious concern because of the overwhelming civic problems stemming from modern progress reflects an intellectual kinship with Lyle Lanier's critique of "The Philosophy of Progress" in *I'll Take My Stand*. James P. Warburg, in *The West in Crisis* (1959), matches our general line by calling for the recapture of our religious and humanistic heritage and for the rescue of "Individual Man" from "the dehumanizing effects of the technological revolution." W. E. Hocking, in his *Strength of Men and Nations* of late autumn (1959), confirms our doctrine in warning man against being mechanized by his own machines to the detriment of our arts and morals.

Much could be said by way of a sequel on the subsequent differences of opinion and action of the authors of *I'll Take My Stand* with respect to the New Deal, TVA, civil rights, desegregation, and related issues. These differences are showing up in the university studies to which I have referred. To other hands I leave that subject. I end where I began, in the realm of faith. My faith at its best is pinned to agrarianism at its best as a Confucian element of balance for civilization at its best. Agrarian society may not equal urban society in the physical creation of the arts. But, significantly, it creates many creators of the arts. At its best, it practices and preserves the arts, including the important art of living.

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## Dualisms in Agrarian Thought

When John Crowe Ransom wrote Allen Tate in the spring of 1927, "... here's a slogan: Give us Dualism, or we'll give you no Art," he was proclaiming a personal aesthetic conviction that was to become a metaphorical representation for the Twelve Southerners' defense of agrarianism as a philosophy and a way of life. For these men of letters and of the social sciences, the world consisted of two principles which they characterized variously as art *vs.* science, religious humanism *vs.* materialism, agrarianism *vs.* industrialism. The one principle was unmistakably good, the other evil.

A consideration of such dichotomies involves more than a documenting of the obvious. It focuses attention and gives a perspective on the philosophical center of Agrarian thought; and although a dualistic intention is apparent in almost all literary uses of the concrete, for the Agrarians a dualism represented more than a mere instinctive realization of the most appropriate and effective mode of aesthetic realization: their aesthetic concern with the particular and the concrete is given depth and reinforced by its link with philosophical dualism. Central to their system of thought is the dualism of art *vs.* science. It pervades and underlies all other areas of concern — economics, personal relationships, history, biography, criticism and literature.

Encompassing the Agrarian view of the complexities of the world into a central dichotomy or even into clusters of paired alternatives is, of course, a simplification of one of America's most fascinating and distinguished group efforts to clog the mechanisms of "progress." But this dichotomous approach permits the student of the movement to perceive that the Agrarians consciously or subconsciously subsumed all aspects of their thought into a dualistic mode which enabled them simultaneously to attack the North and industrialism and to defend the South and agrarianism. Even before they issued their manifesto in *I'll Take My Stand* as their declaration of faith late in 1930, they were able to present with impressive comprehensiveness a strikingly

unified, though separate, vision of a world going awry — in manners, in family relationships, in education, in economics, in religion, in the arts.

Merely to note their commonly paired alternatives is to suggest how pervasive was their dual vision of the world.<sup>1</sup> Inversely they defended agrarianism, art, stability, an organic way of life, and the concrete while they attacked industrialism, urbanism, science, a fragmented, materialistic, chaotic world disintegrating through its devotions to specialization and its insistence on abstract thought. The aesthetic way of life was to be found in the "traditional," agrarian South; in contrast, the scientific, big-business, commercial civilization was burgeoning in the Northeast and spreading, unfortunately, through the New South. The Agrarians' attack on topical matters like the invasion of the Southern countryside and historic communities by "some petty manufacturer of pants or socks . . . [encouraged] to take up tax-exempt residence"<sup>2</sup> was juxtaposed against such universal questions as the relation of the artist to his society, the nature of aesthetic experience, the character of poetic reality, and the values of living.

To attempt an adequate discussion of the implicit and explicit dualisms found in the varieties of their writing, even before the publication of the symposium, would require more space than is available and more patience than the reader might be willing to expend. Perhaps it will suffice to suggest how their individual dualistic approach functioned in several areas of thought, how such treatment served not only to rally twelve Southerners of great integrity to a common cause but to produce a body of poetry and criticism, of historical and biographical

1 In contrast to the basic dualisms (or pluralisms) which seem representative of Southern writers and thinkers—consider, for example, the dichotomies in Jefferson's encomium to the virtuous husbandman, Calhoun's doctrine of the concurrent majority (both linked to the concept of the organic), Grayson's "Hireling and the Slave," Lanier's poem "Symphony"—, nineteenth century New England writers characteristically tended toward monism. Distinctively different results are discernible: the dualist sees simultaneously the concrete (the thing) and the abstract (its universality), and finds both meaningful; the monist, however, *abstracts* the specifics to the concept. Perhaps this tendency toward monism was a significant factor in the intense New England reform movements.

This identification of dualism with Southern thinkers would not deny that the humanists also used a dualistic mode of thought, but their critique of American culture remained primarily in a religio-ethico context. It was the Agrarians who gave the dualisms a socio-economic dimension as well. See Paul Elmer More, "Definitions of Dualism," *Shelburne Essays*, VIII (Boston and New York, 1913), pp. 247-302.

2 Donald Davidson, "I'll Take My Stand: A History," *American Review*, V (Summer, 1935), 304.

analyses, and vital polemical articles perhaps unmatched by any comparable group for originality, skill, variety, and high quality of achievement.

Of the twelve Southerners, eight may be called — in the narrow interpretation of the term — men of letters: when the symposium was published, five were already distinguished as poets and critics — and four of these, Ransom, Davidson, Tate, and Warren, had been closely associated at Vanderbilt with the *Fugitive*; the other poet of the group, the late John Gould Fletcher, had made his reputation the decade before as a critic of the arts and as an Imagist; the remaining men of letters devoted themselves to other literary forms — Stark Young was a novelist and a first-rate drama critic; John Donald Wade was a distinctive biographer, one of the editors of the *Dictionary of American Biography*; and Andrew Lytle, at first a biographer, later revealed his gifts in fiction as a fine raconteur and stylist. The other four contributors belong to the area of the social sciences. Unfortunately often dismissed with some inadequate phrase such as “also among the group,” they include the distinguished Southern historian, the late Frank Owsley; the individualistic agrarian, political scientist Herman Clarence Nixon; the late Henry Blue Kline, journalist (editorial writer for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*) and TVA and AEC public relations officer; and psychologist Lyle Lanier.

What is striking about the work produced by these men, whether poems, biographies, book reviews, or historical analyses, is that their mode was dichotomous, their vision dualistic; and the effect was an explicit defense of an aesthetic, agrarian way of life or an implicit affirmation of its values. The method might be direct or indirect—a positive representation, a negative contrast, or simply an expression of a sense of loss; but the goal — for much of the work produced during the period of Agrarian excitement (roughly from 1927 to 1937) — was the same: a defense or justification of the South and agrarianism, an attack on the North and industrialism.

The Agrarians' central dualism — science *vs.* art — was the dichotomy from which all other oppositions were derived. Upon it, their system of thought, their work as creative artists, their achievements on behalf of Agrarianism were predicated. By “science” they generally meant “applied science,” technology, with which they associated abstract thinking, the “philosophy of progress,” and materialism. Scientific knowledge, to them, was cold, hard, logical, limited — in the phrase of Ransom, an “intellectual variety of anesthesia.” Although it succeeded in producing practical, measurable results and achieving specific goals, it fragmented personality, transformed men into specialists, misused nature, and separated men from their natural environment. As Lyle Lanier described the analogous effects, science produced in the

individual a "dissociation of ideas," a "loss of integrity of personality" while in the social order its consequence was industrialism and concomitant evils. It becomes apparent that whatever its guise — in an individual's life, in history, in literary criticism, in art — for the Agrarians, "science" is destructive. The view it permits is partial; the life it creates is artificial.

"Culture," in its most general sense, cannot be realized in an industrial civilization, the Agrarians felt, for its disciples confuse the mere manifestations of culture with the aesthetic state and mistakenly assume that culture is an economic commodity. But an aesthetic attitude — evidence of a true state of culture — can develop among individuals only if their daily lives reveal a graciousness in manners, only if their pleasures are characterized by desirelessness and are not directed toward demonstrating the usefulness or monetary value of their activities. Culture, suggested Ransom, is not to be bought or acquired rapidly; travel, the widespread reading of books (usually secured through clubs), "education" — these common techniques to which an industrial society resorts to spread a veneer of culture — are ineffectual. Unless individuals acquire through these manifestations of culture the "courage to live simply and with sensibility," they are not cultured. Unless their formal education teaches them how to live, which means, Ransom points out, "not to go out and plunge into industrialism with their fathers and uncles,"<sup>3</sup> they have not attained this state of aesthetic sensibility which is the distinguishing feature of culture. Ransom's convictions appear also in a number of other works produced by the Agrarians both before and after the publication of *I'll Take My Stand*: Stark Young's *River House* (1929) and *So Red the Rose* (1934), in Donald Davidson's *The Tall Men* (1927), in Allen Tate's *The Fathers* (1938). At the Fugitives' reunion in 1956, Frank Owsley, reminiscing about the pre-symposium days, related the decline of culture in America to the spread of industrialism with its materialistic values; when he was a student at the University of Chicago, working in Southern and sectional history, Owsley recalled, he realized that "we were going as a nation into materialism, that money value had become the real basic value, . . . that the common courtesies of life were disappearing — particularly in the North . . . that you went into a store and were insulted rather than welcomed, that the whole civilization of this country was becoming cruder and cruder, that the things that we thought a civilized country stood for were disappearing"<sup>4</sup>

For the Agrarians, then, this central dualism—aesthetics *vs.* science—represents the nature of the sickness which they perceived in an in-

3 *God Without Thunder* (New York, 1930), pp. 173 ff.

4 *Fugitives Reunion*. ed. Rob Roy Purdy (Nashville, 1959), p. 204.



dustrial society and its effect on the individual. A philosophical position has thus become the means of opposing the inherent character of a society which cannot, they suggest, create culture. It can succeed only if it were to change the nature of its subjects' lives; but such a change is impossible, for industrialism is distinguished by its emphasis on the acquisition of material wealth while, said Ransom, "culture is something which will have to be trusted like the grace of God to come of its own accord, but will never come unless the right sort of living invites it."<sup>5</sup> Industrialism confuses means and ends: the external manifestations of culture become a dispensable commodity. This is evidence of the "wrong" sort of living, induced by industrialism. A technological society and a state of culture, as the Agrarians understood them, were logical contradictions. The presence of one, by definition, meant the absence of the other.

The same central dualism is both explicit and implicit in their theory and practice of history. Whether they were reviewing the productions of other historians, writing biographies of Civil War figures, or embodying their own or others' attitudes toward their heritage in their poems or novels, the Agrarians confronted the present with the traditions, leaders, and symbols of their region's past. Ransom's poem "Old Mansion," first appearing in *Chills and Fever* (1924), represents the modern native "intruder's" nostalgically ironic recognition of the loss he must live with; decay has subtly invaded the stability of the Southern mansion, yet the past, in contrast to the present, offered a security that the antiquary (this historian was more than the mere recorder of time's events) would preserve if it were possible:

Emphatically, the old house crumbled; the ruins  
Would litter, as already the leaves, this petted sword;  
And no annalist went in to the lords or the peons;  
The antiquary would finger the bits of shard.

But on retreating I saw myself in the token,  
How loving from my foreign weed the feather curled  
On the languid air; and I went with courage shaken  
To dip, alas, into some unseemlier world.

So, too, did the Agrarians as historians "finger the bits of shard" and "dip, alas, into some unseemlier world." Certain similar ideas about history, the result of research and personal convictions, began to emerge in their prolific writings through the later 1920's; the importance of "facts" was recognized but interpretation of these facts was necessary — and their interpretation (particularly that of

5 *God Without Thunder*, pp. 198-99.



the poets) generally took form in the creation of symbols or a myth. I use "myth" here as Robert Penn Warren defined it in 1935 when discussing Ransom's irony:

A myth is a fiction, a construct, which expresses a truth and affirms a value. It is not an illustration of doctrine. It differs from allegory in that its components, not to be equated with anything else, function in their own right. It is the dynamic truth, the dynamic value . . . myth represents a primary exercise of sensibility in which thought and feeling are one: it is a total communication.<sup>6</sup>

In their reviews of histories and biographies and in their own historical writings, the Agrarians acknowledged the necessity for the "fact." Ransom's discussion of history in *God Without Thunder* begins by placing the function of a fact in perspective: "The primary role of the historian is to establish the 'facts'. . . . *Fact is still the sensible event* . . . . The historical method consists in asking questions or taking testimony from those who have participated in the sensible event." But modern historians go beyond the mere recording of events; "they deal in 'principles,' 'laws,' and 'causes,' much as the physical scientists do . . . . with this business of generalization history enters upon a second or scientific phase, and ceases to be pure function . . . ." <sup>7</sup> Of this phase the Agrarians did not disapprove, as long as the interpretation resulted from utilizing the historical method in the primary sense. But Tate's sharp criticism of what he called "scientific" history was leveled at the historians who described the "what is" and then proceeded to argue that mere existence is proof of validity or value. Such a methodology, Tate maintained, was logically fallacious, for "scientific" method cannot be used to prove the unsoundness of a belief; it can be applied only to the world of existence, not to the world of faith; "The historical and scientific mind has no right to a positive conception of value, for in asserting it, it contradicts its method."<sup>8</sup>

The seriousness with which Tate, Warren, Lytle, and Owsley treated their region's leaders and ante-bellum history, the carefulness of their research, and the choices of subjects — all suggest that their historical method was more than "scissors-and-paste"; it was analytical, interpretive, and ultimately "mythic." It utilized at once the strategies of a military leader — attacking an enemy flank, defending an en-

6 "John Crowe Ransom: A Study in Irony," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, XI (January, 1935), 96.

7 Pp. 56-57.

8 "Confusion and Poetry," *Sewanee Review*, XXXVIII (April-June, 1930), 137-38, 140.

trenched position. Implicit again is the dualistic approach. Tate, for example, objected to the Northern writing of Southern history which had become so complete that "Southern school children sing 'Land of the Pilgrims' Pride'; . . . [and] well meaning orators . . . tell the citizens, on Confederate Memorial Day, that they need not be ashamed of a grandfather who fought with Lee, that the grandfather could not have known how God had to use four years of war to show them the righteousness of Big Business and the iniquity of the farm."<sup>9</sup> A presentation of Southern history in terms of individuals — Tate's Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis, Warren's John Brown, Lytle's Bedford Forrest — enabled these biographers not only to render the past as a living reality but also to symbolize through their re-created personalities the opposition between two ways of life. Here was history emerging, in Fletcher's description, as a "series of symbols . . . infused with profound spiritual meaning"; here was their "myth," their account of a South representing "the great myth of our modern world: the story of man trying to tame the machine he has invented."<sup>10</sup> Tate's *Stonewall Jackson* (1928) is distinctive not only for its understanding of the battles and military strategy of the Civil War up to the time of Jackson's death but also for the depiction of the fundamental opposition of two ways of life — Northern and Southern. Davidson, in reviewing the biography for his Nashville *Tennessean* column, recognized it as both a defensive bulwark and an offensive weapon for a battle the Agrarians were to engage in:

The troubled modern turns with relief to a figure that wears no uncertainty of the heroic, and finds cause to cleave to as well as true stuff of art . . . . We of the South all have Mr. Tate's problem: we must recover the past, or at least in some way realize it in order that we may bring the most genuine and essential parts of our tradition forward in contact with the inevitable new tradition now in process of formation.<sup>11</sup>

Tate's approach to the analysis of events involving Jefferson Davis was likewise dualistic: "The issue," he wrote, "was class rule and religion *versus* democracy and science."<sup>12</sup> Again, Davidson voiced his warm approval, noting that the work fortified the Southern position immensely. *John Brown* (1929) too, became a kind of mythic embodiment of conflict between alternative philosophies. As Warren depicted

<sup>9</sup> "More about the Reconstruction," *New Republic*, LXIII (August 13, 1930), 376.

<sup>10</sup> *The Two Frontiers, A Study in Historical Psychology* (New York, 1930), pp. 23-24.

<sup>11</sup> "Stonewall Jackson's Way," "The Critic's Almanac," *Tennessean*, April 29, 1928.

<sup>12</sup> *Jefferson Davis, His Rise and Fall* (New York, 1929), p. 301.

the abolitionist, Brown was dramatized and symbolized as a sort of Puritan-Transcendentalist fanatic; his life became an historical metaphor, a microcosmic representation of what was to become a central theme of the Agrarian movement: the danger of living by abstract principles. Andrew Lytle's *Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company* (1931) also treated Civil War History from a dualistic perspective: "It was a conflict between a people living almost entirely on the land and a people loyal to a commercial and fast-growing industrialism which demanded that the duty of the citizen must not be life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness but a willing consumption of the produce of Northern manufacture" (p.30). John Gould Fletcher had planned to use the materials of history for a poem about the War between the States; although it never was realized, he has recorded his view of the conflict as a symbolic dualism—"a conflict between two opposing views, two diametrically opposite ways of living: the agrarian, feudal way of the South, and the industrial mercantile way of the North." He had intended to transpose it "out of the dimension of historic fact into the dimension of myth and fable," transforming it from the temporal to the universal.<sup>13</sup> And in his contribution to *I'll Take My Stand*, an essay devoted entirely to analyzing the cause of the Civil War, Frank Owsley focused on the same dichotomy in pointing "the untruth of the self-righteous Northern legend which makes the South the war criminal":

Complex though the factors were which finally caused war, they all grew out of two fundamental differences which existed between the two sections: the North was commercial and industrial, and the South was agrarian. The fundamental and passionate ideal for which the South stood and fell was the ideal of an agrarian society . . . History and literature, profane and sacred, twined their tendrils about the cottage and the villa, not the factory.<sup>14</sup>

Science, its methods, and its values have had a deleterious effect on literary criticism and art as well, the Agrarian poets and critics were convinced. Their attacks in this context were necessarily predicated on the fundamental dualism of art *vs.* science, the ramifications of which included oppositions between the artist and his society, the artist and the "schooled" critic, an emotionally realized poetry and an intellectual statement, the concreteness of the experienced and the abstractness of the theoretical. The dominance of the "scientific" half of such dichotomies, they suggested, results from the power and pervasive influence of our technological society. A civilization with a living

<sup>13</sup> *Life Is My Song* (New York, 1937), pp. 286-87.

<sup>14</sup> "The Irrepressible Conflict," *I'll Take My Stand* (New York, 1930), pp. 68, 69.

myth has been destroyed, Tate and Warren noted in reviews, and the modern artist is unable to create as effectively as he might have done, had he been able to devote all his attention to form an expression. Many literary critics have been contaminated with the effects of a civilization obsessed by scientific fact. The result, Tate asserted, is that "writers are examined, not for their artistic effectiveness, but for their origin, and still more perniciously, for the assumed pathology of their ideas . . . . The split mind of the poet meets its counterpart in the disfranchised intellect of the critic."<sup>15</sup> "Scientific" literary critics are also recognizable by their judgement of creative works on the basis of a single system of values; such critics are scientific rather than literary because they evaluate according to a formula, they operate from a *priori* assumptions. The *creative* literary critic, however, judges a work for the quality of its particularities, for its individual, concrete character.

The poet and novelist, too, are considered and criticized as "scientific" if their works appear as intellectual statements of the temper or beliefs of the times and not as concrete experiences revealing the artist's and appealing to the reader's sensibilities. Just as "formulas will never fully explain the poem, and will probably not even explain [the critics'] judgment of the poem,"<sup>16</sup> so, too, "poetry with the tendency to ideas betrays itself into criticism, . . . an intellectual conception which can become so complete that [the poet] finds there is no symbolism, no expressive correspondence, no poetry for it."<sup>17</sup> Novelists, too, were criticized for succumbing to "science." Ernest Hemingway's characterizations in *A Farewell to Arms* were obviously influenced by behaviorism, Davidson noted, and the mere tabulating of the bare facts and the reduction of style "to its lowest and most natural terms" were the result, he suggested, of an unsuccessful attempt to combine science and art.<sup>18</sup>

For the Fugitive Agrarians, the dualisms of sensibility and reason, of the concrete and the abstract are fundamental. These Southerners were convinced that insofar as the poet and the critic seek a reason for the creation of art and allow their reason to dominate or control their production, they have been victimized by science. The only world in which the artist can effectively function, the only world in

15 "The Revolt against Literature," *New Republic*, XLIX (February 9, 1927), 330.

16 John Crowe Ransom, "The Poet and the Critic," *New Republic*, LI (June 22, 1927), 126.

17 "A Poetry of Ideas," *New Republic*, XLVII (June 30, 1926), 172. This objection to intellectualized poetry was made by Tate in a review of T. S. Eliot's *Poems: 1909-1925*.

18 "Perfect Behavior," "Critic's Almanac," *Nashville Tennessean*, November 3, 1929.

which man can realize or regain the wholeness of his being is that in which aesthetic qualities and aesthetic values prevail. "What we require always," wrote Ransom to Tate three years before the publication of *I'll Take My Stand*, "is to return simply to the senses . . . . The artist is the man who keeps his eyes open and is not afraid to look . . . . there are no formulas. The formulas are the specific delusion." The dualism embodied in the separation between the experience of concrete reality and the construction of abstract theory represented not only the *modus vivendi* for art but the foundation for a critique of an industrial society and a defense of an agrarian way of life.

Ransom's declaration to Tate, "Give us Dualism, or we'll give you no art," was emblematic. Without their paired alternatives, without their dichotomies, the Agrarians' declaration of independence from industrialism, the "American or prevailing way" of life, would have been less original, less radical; and *I'll Take My Stand* might have been described, if it was noted at all, simply as a topical phenomenon instead of a metaphor for their attack on the sickness of the modern world.

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## The Regions Versus The Nation: Critical Battle of The Thirties

Perhaps the most convenient literary critical term which we have discovered in the twentieth century is "regionalist" — a label which conceals a good deal more than it illuminates, but one which seems to express a solid measured judgment. Judicious or not, "regionalist," with its heavy connotative carry-over from "provincial," or "sectional," or "local-color," has significations of "mediocre," "quaint," and, literarily-speaking, "second-rate." One thinks of the minor greatness of Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman; one does not think of Mark Twain or even Emily Dickinson. Yet all these authors are peculiarly and completely associated with a particular landscape possessed of particular regional influences. The problem could be superficially dismissed as academic hairsplitting, if it had not been attacked with wild fury in the mid-thirties, and if the vestiges of that attack had not remained to condition our contemporary literary judgments.

The twenty-year period following World War I can almost be labeled "The Rediscovery and Re-evaluation of America." Because of the conjunction of many factors, such as the importation of new instruments of measurement implicit in the Marxian and Freudian theories; the enormously increased mobility of large masses of Americans due, first, to the movement of many Americans to France in World War I, and, later, to the standardized production and mass distribution of automobiles; the new freedoms and even "license" of social conduct and morality which resulted from the new "enlightenment" and in turn fostered a cynical, but still critical and curious, frame of mind; the abundance of wealth and leisure in the boom-twenties which made intellectual pursuits possible and fashionable; the immense expansion of modern industrialism which encouraged a highly centralized economic



structure and sounded the death knell for the traditional village-and-countryside kind of life; the crushing impact of the Great Depression which paralyzed the vitals of the nation and raised urgent questions which had to be answered; — because of all these factors (and probably many others), the American mind was forced to turn in on itself — to examine, to criticize, to catalogue, to remember.<sup>1</sup>

The resulting activity marked this period as perhaps the most stimulating, the most creative, and the most frenetic in our national life.<sup>2</sup> Our topography was mapped and surveyed and carefully delineated into regions by geographers. Mineralogists, geologists, climatologists, and experts on wild-life swarmed over the face of the nation — collecting information, measuring data, and offering as their conclusions further regional maps of the nation. "This is the Cotton Belt; this is a temperature zone; this is a river valley; this is tidewater land." These scouts were followed quickly by a battalion of sociologists, moving into a physical region and making their measurements in terms of racial stock, occupation, income bracket, religious and political preference, educational status, language dialect, etc. And with regions physically and sociologically established, enter the historian, the folklorist, the philologist, the cultural anthropologist, and the man of letters.

<sup>1</sup> For a general overview of this era see the following: Arthur M. Schlesinger and Dixon Ryan Fox, *A History of American Life* (New York, 1927-1944); Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties* (New York, 1931); and Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, *America in Midpassage*, (New York, 1939).

<sup>2</sup> In documentation it is impossible to do more than suggest the prolific activity of researchers and theorists in the redefinition of American areas and backgrounds. The following titles are meant to indicate the scope and variety of this activity: Charles O. Faullen, *Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States* (Washington, D. C., 1932); Charles A. and Mary R. Beard, *The Rise of American Civilization* (New York, 1927, 1933); Walter P. Webb, *The Great Plains*, (Boston 1931); Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Rise Of the City, 1878-1898* (New York, 1933); Robert S. and Helen M. Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary Culture* (New York, 1939); Howard W. Odum and Harry E. Moore, *American Regionalism: A Cultural-Historical Approach to National Integration* (New York, 1938); Constance M. Rourke, *American Humor: A Study of National Character* (New York, 1931); Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (New York, 1936); Frank Shay, *Here's Audacity: American Legendary Heroes* (New York, 1930); Ralph L. Rusk, *The Literature of the Middle Western Frontier* (New York, 1925); Lucy L. Hazard, *The Frontier in American Literature* (New York, 1927); and Percy H. Boynton, *The Rediscovery of the Frontier* (Chicago, 1931); This period also saw the beginnings of the Melville revival, the establishment of the bi-monthly journal, *American Speech* (1925), under the editorship of Kemp Malone, Arthur G. Kennedy and Louise Pound, the Works Progress Administration's state history projects, and the launching of Farrar & Rinehart's *Rivers of America* Series in the late 1930's.

The history of the United States was completely rewritten; the hallowed Periclean figures of the early Republic were debunked, interpreted "economically," and then re-laid to rest. Our great historical events — the founding of the colonies, the establishment of the Federation, the westward expansion, slavery and the Civil War, the Indian extermination — all were violently resurrected and re-evaluated. And this historical interest pervaded the regions. Historians recalled the Frederick Jackson Turner premise that "the economic, political, and social life of the United States, even its literature, psychology, and its religious organizations, must be described by sections . . . in spite of similarity of traits and institutions throughout the nation, it is also a congeries of sections." Every local area had its historical researcher, and during the depression the Works Progress Administration sponsored histories of every state.

Folklorists and philologists infiltrated the back-country with recording apparatus. Isolated dialects, rural superstitions, ballads and local legends were fed into the vast statistical mill. Negro spirituals, jazz, cowboy songs, and traditional folk dances asserted a new claim to sophistication for themselves, because they were "native" and in some way integral to an understanding of the composite of American life. Local heroes, historical and legendary — Daniel Boone, Paul Bunyan, Mike Fink, John Henry, Osceola — became focuses of regional pride and perhaps national envy. Even specimens of local indigenous architecture — the Cape Cod "Salt-box" and the adobe pueblo — were entered into the cultural indices which aimed at measuring regional characteristics in order to determine both their environmental effect and their resultant contribution to the nation as a whole.

The entrance of the literary man — whether critic or creator — led to an inevitable confusion which became entangled with non-literary movements and touched off the "New York City versus the regions" warfare of the late twenties and early thirties. The crux of the confusion can be realized as follows: the essence of the scientific (or social-scientific) method of ascertaining "predictability" lies in the assumption that the object to be measured has no conscious control over its measurements. The stone cannot "pretend" to weigh more or less than it actually weighs, nor can it "will" itself to weigh more or less because it wants to. To be sure there are many areas in which the human being, or a group of human beings, can be as accurately measured as the stone. But there are other areas (and these will probably remain until the psychologists achieve their deterministic Nirvana) in which human beings, acting either consciously or unconsciously, can change their weights in accordance with their wills. Thus, one of our most eminent folklorists writes:

It is when one attempts to transfer regionalism [from the domain of the geographers and sociologists] to the psychological or imaginative environment and apply it to literature

as a critical or creative approach that it becomes mixed with localism, provincialism, and sectionalism, and in danger of becoming a cult.<sup>3</sup>

That this danger was realized in the thirties is apparent to anyone who has read much of the fiction and literary polemics of the period.

The gross effect of this frantic division of the nation into regions was, for literature, an emphasis on the *differences*, rather than the contributory effect which each section exerted toward the composite whole. *Differences* were magically transformed into *values*; a high degree of industrialization, a low *per capita* consumption of farm machinery, Fundamentalism — these became, not facts, but ideals to be cherished and insulated against any change. The problem becomes further aggravated when we remember that contemporaneous with this accelerated attention to regional differences was a counter-movement of national standardization and cultural unity. The national habit of radio and movies,<sup>4</sup> the increase in road-construction and automobile consumption, the extension of railroad, trucking, and airplane transportation, the centralization of the financial structure of the country, the more active role of government in internal affairs, the further clustering of the publishing industry in New York City, the continued development of giant newspaper chains with the gradual disappearance of the local independent paper, the octopus growth of urban centers — all these factors worked to erase the regional boundaries, to mold an undistinctive average mask on the face of America. The two forces had to explode on contact, and they did.

The influential magazine *The Bookman*, which later became *The American Review*, allied itself with several regional groups — most importantly the Southern Agrarians — to wage battle against New York City under the sign of what seemed at times a rather exclusive "regionalism." *The Saturday Review of Literature* (under Henry S. Canby's editorship) tried to steer a middle-road position between the extremists of both sides, but found the going very tough indeed. The most articulate group to voice its rebellion was the Southern Agrarians, an outgrowth of "The Fugitives" who centered around Vanderbilt University (1921-1925).

3 B. A. Botkin, "Regionalism: Cult or Culture?" *English Journal* XXV (Mar. 1936), 181.

4 The movies, of course, antedate this period by a quarter of a century; but, their pre-World War I popularity notwithstanding, the establishment of the star system even further increased their hold on national image-making. A roll-call of some of the "stars" of the twenties and thirties will illustrate: Mary Pickford, William S. Hart, Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., Theda Bara, Rudolph Valentino, Greta Garbo, Charlie Chaplin, and Shirley Temple. The first commercial radio station (KDKA) went into operation in 1920; by 1937 there were an estimated 26,000,000 radios in American homes.

The twelve southerners who collaborated on *I'll Take My Stand* (1930) were spokesmen of the "regionalistic-difference" school throughout the country. Donald Davidson, the most outspoken of the spokesmen, described the Agrarian position as follows:

The past, they granted, was not recoverable in its old form. Nevertheless, the way of life, or the set of cultural or economic preferences that united the Southern states, had survived its historic reverses so persistently as to have new merit for a country hideously entangled in the fluctuating ways of the industrial regime. The Agrarians declared the system of large-scale industrialism and high finance unsound economically . . . . The traditions of the South, bound up with the ways of land and people, they defined as agrarian, conservative, stable, religious.<sup>5</sup>

Applying this concept to literature as "a retreat from the artistic leviathanism of the machine age," Davidson defines literary regionalism:

Regionalism is not an end in itself, not a literary affectation, not an aesthetic credo, but a condition of literary realization. The function of a region is to endow the American artist with character and purpose. He is born of a region . . . . what he creates, if he can resist the perversions of our time, will be both the expression of the region and himself, no matter what the subject or what the style.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, Davidson does not care to allow the existence of urban-regions, as witnessed by the following rather childish explosion:

. . . New York transmitted to the one people on earth who were freest of class consciousness, the Marxian theory of the war of the classes. To the least neurotic and most energetic of races [*sic*] it offered the Freudian doctrine of repression and complexes. To a people the greater part of whom were schooled in Protestant religion and morality New York presented with a knowing leer . . . the works of voluptuaries and perverts [the immediate referent is the works of D. H. Lawrence and Gertrude Stein] . . .<sup>7</sup>

A saner view is given by Mary Austin, quoting Dorothy Canfield Fisher:

"Regionalism in literature . . . is the answer to the problem of getting any literature at all out of so vast and sprawling

5 *The Attack on Leviathan* (Chapel Hill, 1938), p. 93.

6 *Leviathan*, p. 239.

7 *Leviathan*, p. 136.

a country as ours." She might as truthfully have said it of any art and any country which is large enough to cover more than one type of natural environment.<sup>8</sup>

The extreme view on the other side, the "no-regional-differences" school is taken by James Gray:

That militantly American doctrine called regionalism, which has tended in recent years to make of local prejudice something vaguely resembling a religion, would probably hold that the Heavenly Muse does herself over, with protean variability, each time that she crosses a state line.<sup>9</sup>

Obviously a compromise between the two schools is necessary. Paul Robert Beath in a symposium conducted by *The Saturday Review of Literature* suggests that extreme regionalism is often motivated by "an inferiority complex" (it hates New York City); it runs the danger of isolating itself from "the great tradition"; it tends to be preoccupied with mediocrity; and it exploits "the rural folk at the expense of the urban folk."<sup>10</sup> Lewis Mumford carries the argument a step further, again referring to the extreme regionalists:

The besetting weakness of regionalism lies in the fact that it is in part a blind reaction against outward circumstances and disruptions, an attempt to find refuge within an old shell against the turbulent invasions of the outside world, armed with its new engines: in short, an aversion from what is, rather than an impulse toward what may be. For the merely sentimental regionalist, the past was an absolute . . . In that sense, regionalism, it seems plain, was antihistorical and anti-organic; for it denied both the fact of change and the possibility that anything of value could come out of it.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand Joseph E. Baker makes some telling points against the extreme anti-regionalists in the same *Saturday Review of Literature* symposium. He points out that it is impossible to deny the fact of region; regions do exist with different geographical, climatological, ethnic, and historical backgrounds; he also argues convincingly that the large metropolitan centers and industrial areas — which are them-

8 "Regionalism in American Fiction," *English Journal*, XXI (Feb. 1932) 99.

9 "The Minnesota Muse," *Saturday Review of Literature*, XVI (June 12, 1937), 3.

10 "Regionalism: Pro and Con. Four Fallacies of Regionalism," XIX (Nov. 28, 1936), 3.

11 Quoted in Howard W. Odum and Harry E. Moore, *American Regionalism* (New York, 1938), p. 170.



selves regions — exert a disproportionate influence on the kind of literature which can be produced anywhere in the country. But he also adds, and it is at this point that agreement between the schools can be reached: "The regionalist who ignores the universal is at fault, of course; the life of his region is his medium of expression, not his message. . . ." The argument resolves itself then into a balancing by degrees of the old philosophical see-saw: the Particular versus the Universal. We can then agree with William Allen White that: "In the nature of things the Great American Novel must be a composite of regional novels."<sup>12</sup> But we must also remember Lewis Mumford's two principles for a sound non-insular regionalism: "One is, *cultivate whatever you have*, no matter how poor it is; *it is at least your own*. The other is, *seek elsewhere for what you do not possess*; absorb whatever is good wherever you may find it; make it your own."<sup>13</sup>

However, even though we can rather easily arrive at some kind of compromise on the theory of regionalism today, twenty years after the battle, it is undeniable that some of our recent writers of fiction have had their reputations considerably inflated or deflated as a result of their chance association with one or another of the heterogeneous movements which loosely grouped together into the two opposing coalitions. The coalitions we can somewhat gingerly reconstruct as follows, remembering that in practice probably no writer or critic succeeded in turning himself into one or the other doctrinal monster. The "Regionalists" tended to be agrarian, more or less conventionally religious, and generally suspicious of "social progress," whether it dallied with Marxian principles or aimed at a Freudian liberation of the inner man; aesthetically they championed The New Criticism (which emphasized *form* over *content*), and creatively they tended to be either highly experimental or neo-realistic — the former, usually in poetry ("The Fugitives"), the latter, with some very great exceptions (*The Sound and the Fury*), in prose. The "Nationalists" — a brute term, but perhaps specially applicable here — were usually urban-dominated, amenable to some degree of faith in conscious social improvement, and generally receptive to the technological facade of the modern world; aesthetically they were less absorbed in problems of *form* than were the Regionalists, and creatively they tended to go beyond neo-realism into either an unshamed naturalism (*Studs Lonigan*) or a type of symbolism-as-propaganda (*Waiting for Lefty*).

Obviously these two coalitions were constructed of too many internally contradictory components to hold the complete faith of any single adherent, and it is perhaps a tribute to the elasticity of the

<sup>12</sup> "Racy of the Soil," *Saturday Review of Literature*, X (April 7, 1934), 607.

<sup>13</sup> Odum and Moore, p. 23.



human mind that we can hypothetically group such dissimilars as Waldo Frank and Carl Sandburg on one side, fronting them with the equally incongruous pair of James Branch Cabell and Stark Young. Indeed, and ironically, one of the most successful adulators of the machine turns out to be the anti-technological Faulkner in those passages in *Pylon* and *Sartoris* where he implies that the airplane and the sports-car are the logical and improved successors to the nineteenth-century cavalry horse. On the other hand, one of the most dramatic statements of man's mystical union with the land is found in Steinbeck's socially-oriented *Grapes of Wrath* in the famous "tractoring out" episode. This coalition-theory does not, thus, explain or illuminate the artistic achievements of any good writer of this period, since any good writer will almost necessarily transcend these categorical barriers.

But this theory may throw light upon the question of why some writers were embraced so wholeheartedly, while others were effectively neglected. I am concerned here primarily with those writers whose neglect was practically insured by the administration of the label, "regionalist" — such writers as Ellen Glasgow, Elizabeth Madox Roberts, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, and, to some extent, Robert Frost; but I should suppose that this theory might be helpful also in understanding the causes of the Melville revival, the Henry James rejuvenation, and the oblivion which surrounded, and in some cases still surrounds, James Gould Cozzens, Conrad Aiken, Benedict Tielen, and Nathanael West. The first group, the so-called "regionalists," labored under the grave handicap of offering in their work no easy handles for their admirers to embrace. They characteristically avoided authoritative pronouncements on the inevitable direction which twentieth-century American life was travelling in; their works failed to attract attention either by the "shock" quality of their subject matter or their techniques of expression; and the critics who might have been friendly to them — either the "New" or the "Social" — concerned as they were in their own dubious battle, failed to mount an effective claque.

This most recent battle of the books is over; its armistice was signed with the beginning of World War II, and both sides have won and lost. The "Nationalists" conquered as they inevitably had to with the "ultimate weapon," television — a weapon which irrevocably destroys all regional boundaries. The "Regionalists" in losing absorbed their victories with the complete triumph of the "New Critical" approach, but they too surrendered their purity to the encroachments of "archetypal patterns" and "myth-making." The battle is over, but the pejorative assessment of Miss Glasgow, Miss Roberts, *et al.*, as "regionalists" lingers on for the literary historian to formulate as unalterable law. It is here that we need re-reading and re-evaluation.

Every writer must use local materials as the working ingredients of his art; nothing is created out of nothing. In a sense, then, Dreiser, Hemingway, Tolstoi, and even Kafka are indisputably "regionalists."

Some writers are interested in absorbing more than one regional landscape into their creative reservoirs; but these writers, like Sinclair Lewis, James Gould Cozzens, and Ernest Hemingway are still "regionalistic" in every individual novel that they produce. Others, like James T. Farrell, Faulkner, and Elizabeth Madox Roberts, choose more or less to remain with the material that — for whatever reason — seems most attractive and workable to them. The subject matter, with the word "matter" used in its fundamental chaotic sense, is relatively unimportant; the informing mind, the steady, consistent, artistic purpose — this is all important. If we subscribe to Allen Tate's definition of regionalism as "the immediate organic sense of life in which a fine artist works," we will be acting as critics; if, however, we use the term "regionalist" to categorize vapidly, we abdicate our responsibilities of critical judgment in the name of a fine obscurantism.

## Book Reviews

*Fugitives' Reunions Conversations at Vanderbilt May 3-5, 1956*, ed. Rob Roy Purdy. 223 pp. \$5.00. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1959.

Literary history seems to be at least in part an attempt to impose names and definitions on groups and movements that are important enough to be labeled, but often the participating members of a group remain unaware of unifying factors that seem clearly apparent to others. It is rare and perhaps unique to find a prominent literary circle discussing its origin a third of a century after its disbanding. *Fugitives' Reunion* is a printed version of tape recordings of four sessions of conversations among the Fugitives at Vanderbilt University in May, 1956. Their failure to reach a unanimity of views should perhaps be expected. Indeed the Fugitives have been less aware than their critics of a singularity of purpose. When Robert Penn Warren left Vanderbilt, he says in *Fugitives' Reunion*, "the notion of a unity had just never occurred to me, really, except that the unity was just purely a unity of friendship and common background."

John Crowe Ransom enrolled as a student at Vanderbilt University in 1903. "The Discursive Stage," a term used by Louise Cowan in her literary history, *The Fugitive Group*, lasted from that date until the disruption of meetings and conversations by World War I. After the war the group reassembled at Vanderbilt, and in 1922 the first thin unpretentious volume of *The Fugitive* appeared. Four volumes and nineteen issues preceded suspension of publication in 1925. Then the group separated, and only four of the Fugitives (John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Allen Tate, and Warren) were among the Agrarians who published in 1930 the controversial basic document of the Agrarians, *I'll Take My Stand...* From 1925 until their reunion in May 1956 the Fugitives remained apart.

No one was more aware than the Fugitives of the ironies involved in the contrast between the early meetings and the reunion. Thirty-four years before, they had been a group of young Southerners rather unconscious at first of their regional identities. In 1956 most of them had fled to the golden North, yet they were still regarded as conservative Southerners and almost the founders of the Southern literary renaissance. The spontaneousness of the early days was replaced in

1956 by the good sponsorship of the American Studies Association, the Rockefeller Foundation, and Vanderbilt University. Conversations directed by the whims of the members of the group as it sat in a living room or on a front porch gave way to the formality of the round table and professional critics observing and querying. Obscurity vanished before fame, tape recorders, and the interest of posterity. Hopeful readings of unpublished poems by unpublished poets were replaced by public readings in an auditorium of poems written and published years before. The Fugitives in their first recorded meetings in 1956 were almost embarrassed. Allen Tate referred to the group as "a *corpus* . . . about to be studied," and Warren compared the Fugitives to "frog legs in the skillet . . . . The legs will twitch all right, but what are you learning?"

The reader of these conversations will reach some conclusions, but even a scholar like Mr. Louis Rubin, who wrote the introduction to the volume, cannot quite say what he has learned yet. Elusive impressions seem at least as important as any systematic conclusions. The individual personalities stand clear and distinct. Warren seems to be the most humorous, earthy, and profound; Ransom is the most humble, the most admired; as the radical conservative of the group, Donald Davidson is greatly respected and surprisingly conciliatory; William Y. Elliott, though provocative and brilliant, talks more than his share in an effort to formulate and guide the conversations; Tate is shrewd, learned, and (forgive the term) a bit stuffy.

Obviously one cannot read this book without attempting to arrive at conclusions about the distinctive characteristics of the early Fugitive group. Most amazing to a modern is the breadth of their learning, due to education in classical literature and philosophy and in English literature, the eclectic curriculum provided by the old Southern academies which these men attended, and the professors and the traditional curriculum of Vanderbilt in the early part of the century. They had in common also a willingness to serve the muse, a Southern heritage that became increasingly apparent, sharp critical minds, and tough hides that enabled them to endure the barbs of their antagonists. The infinite variety of personalities, creeds, and disagreements stimulated and provoked the Fugitives.

*Fugitives' Reunion* should dispel once and for all the views of the laymen who wrap all the Fugitives and Agrarians into one package and define their unified accomplishments or their singular failure to face the modern world. Although there is almost uniform condemnation of modernism by the Fugitives and Agrarians (and what intellectual of our age does believe that whatever is, is even mostly right?), the areas of disagreement are perhaps most significant. By this time it is apparent that the term *Fugitive* varied in definition from time to time and from poet to poet. Davidson defends the oral tradition of poetry as op-

posed to poetry copyrighted in books, but Tate argues that "It's a choice between literary poetry or none at all . . . ." And he explains his statement. ". . . words in common usage in the ordinary human affairs, day after day, are debased by sociology, commercialism, and what not." Andrew Lytle and Davidson argue for the continuity between the Fugitives and the Agrarians, but Merrill Moore, abetted by Elliott, maintains that "there were two distinct movements, even though one grew into another . . . ." Davidson defines *I'll Take My Stand* as "a defense of poetry." Tate terms it "the reaffirmation of religious humanism." Warren comes as close as anyone ever will perhaps to defining Agrarianism in its general terms: "But for me it was a protest . . . against certain things: against a kind of de-humanizing and disintegrative effect on your notion of what an individual person could be in the sense of a loss of your role in society." But Warren's un-Southern application of that definition has already been rejected by at least one of Warren's Agrarian associates. And the general definition has also been denied by those anti-Agrarian readers who delight in labeling the group as absurdly romantic or fascist. Tate also termed Agrarianism as a reaffirmation of "aristocratic Aristotelianism," but Warren quickly objected to *aristocratic* as the word had been applied to Agrarians pejoratively.

Both the scholar and the general reader should find *Fugitives' Reunion* provocative. If the reader himself has not talked with poets, he feels that he has heard almost intimate rambling conversations of the Fugitives about their own group and the art of making poetry. This book provides no definitive answer on any subject; but, like the earlier *Fugitives and Agrarians*, the book asks many significant questions about our society and our time.

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*The Fugitive Group: A Literary History*, by Louise Cowan. 277 pp.  
\$5.00. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1959.

Mrs. Cowan's book is more modest than its full title would suggest. Limiting the account to her subjects' formative years — her story ends in 1928 — and limiting also her historical context in the main to the local milieu, the author presents a well-annotated record of *The Fugitive* magazine project, its origins and its immediate aftermath of Robert Penn Warren and Allen Tate, had only well begun effects. The important literary history of the group members, particu-

where Mrs. Cowan's history ends, and she is able, therefore, only to suggest the significant work and influence of the group.

Within its limits, however, this book is a valuable one for the student of modern American letters, for it supplies us with considerable material (chiefly in the form of letters) which has been previously unavailable in print. Mrs. Cowan has had access to many private documents and has been able often to verify her factual material through close acquaintance with most of the figures with whom she deals. Written in its original form as a thesis project under Donald Davidson at Vanderbilt University, *The Fugitive Group* has all the advantages, but many of the disadvantages, of an "inside job."

Mrs. Cowan supplies us with a wealth of detail about the early meetings of the Fugitive nucleus, about the magazine itself, its birth pangs, its financial problems and the literary wrangles which its continued publication fomented. Though little really new emerges from this documentation, it is good to have the full evidence of letters and corroborative memories for a movement so important as that which the Nashville poets originated. Mrs. Cowan's story is always readable despite the minuteness of the record, and its factual basis seems unimpeachable. The shortcomings which the book displays lie in the interpretive emphases, and these were perhaps unavoidable under the close circumstances in which the research was done.

Mrs. Cowan is evidently too intimate with her subjects to allow her historical objectivity. She is committed to an uncritical appreciation of them, modified only by her special accord with Mr. Davidson's critical attitudes. Her rare negative judgments are hedged about like those of a friend of the family. The faults noted are likely to be those of an immaturity soon to be corrected in the natural growth process. When she must quote adverse judgments of one individual on a major work of another, she feels it necessary to modify and even explain away the criticism.

Tate and Davidson, for example, exchanged sound telling criticisms of the former's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" and the latter's "The Tall Men" before publication. Tate complained of Davidson's "failure to reduce the material at hand to order" — and this is Davidson's prime failing — while Davidson found the beauty of Tate's poem a "cold beauty" — and Tate's basic weakness is just that. Mrs. Cowan proceeds to explain the attitudes of the two men at this point, implying that the judgments were wayward, and then remarks: "Tate's real objection to Davidson's poem, however, must have stemmed from a dissatisfaction with its language more than with its theme." But Tate's dissatisfaction was simply, and rightly, with structure.

I cite this passage especially because it illustrates also a general, and again perhaps inevitable, disproportion in Mrs. Cowan's careful



work. The impression of Davidson as poet, even as editor, becomes too imposing altogether. Others, like Jesse Wills and Alec Stevenson, Stanley Johnson and Ridley Wills, throw too large a shadow as well, for their work was overrated by their colleagues at the time. The author does very little to correct the balances which her evidences offered Ransom, Tate, and Warren, the three major poets of the group, inevitably suffer when praise is scattered with such catholicity.

Another apparent influence of the book's thesis origin appears in its final tendency. Mrs. Cowan takes leave of the Fugitives on the eve of their Agrarian adventure, when Ransom, Tate, Davidson, and Warren joined in a second common cause. The book's implication is that in Agrarianism all these men had found their natural and final *point d'appuis*. "In *I'll Take My Stand* . . . they were to make the transition from accomplished poets to men of letters and thinkers," says the author. Ransom had some time earlier made this transition, and he recovered quickly from his Agrarian commitment, which he later called "a mode of repentance." Re-examination of their traditions was certainly crucial to Tate and Warren, but chiefly for their development as poets and writers of fiction. The Agrarian cause itself, however, was for them, as Warren has put it, a form of "protest," not a doctrine by which a "transition" was accomplished. Only with Davidson did the economic thesis of the agrarian ideal become the dominant concern of his future activity as a man of letters. And Davidson virtually ceased activity as a creative writer shortly thereafter.

On a larger scale, Mrs. Cowan's perspective is affected by what would seem to be an overzealous and overjealous Southernism. She clearly details the anti-sectional bias of the group in its early years; she notes specific debts of the poets to Browning and Frost, to Baudelaire, Laforgue, Pound, Eliot, and Crane, as well as to the Classics. Yet, as appears explicitly in her Introduction and more subtly elsewhere, she wishes to credit Southern culture, language, and "sense of form" with the whole burden of their achievement. The specific heritage which she lists had, of course, been continuously available before 1920, but what *The Double Dealer* of New Orleans called "treachery sentimentality" had been its major literary contribution. The Southern Renaissance, to which the Fugitives gave much of the impetus, resulted very largely from the intrusions of the outside world and new values, resulting from the shake-up of World War I, upon the heritage that Mrs. Cowan would make self-sufficient.

Despite its unsatisfactory emphases, Mrs. Cowan's book remains a solid source-book to which students of our era must return. One could wish that she had included an authoritative bibliography for the period she covers, but her index of *The Fugitive* magazine itself is a

valuable addition. It is to be hoped that Mrs. Cowan will be enabled in the future to edit the complete correspondence of the Fugitives. If we may judge from the quotations provided in this volume, a provocative book could be made of them.

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